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# FACTORS INHIBITING THE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA

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**FACTORS INHIBITING THE PERFORMANCE OF AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH LIBRARIES  
AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN NIGERIA.**

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### **Abstract**

*Agricultural Research Libraries have been established as information support system in recognition of the importance of information in agricultural research and development efforts of Nigeria. It is observed that agricultural sector has not been doing well in recent past and this has partly been attributed to the inability of the libraries to provide relevant and timely information services/resources to researchers and other stakeholders in agriculture and production: this paper stresses major issues, that indicate the performance of agricultural research libraries and information services in Nigeria, including: the nature of library professional, poor reward and accountability value, inadequate funding environment etc. A number of recommendations are made as way forward if the agricultural research librarian is to be more relevant and proactive in providing information services/ resources for research and development in agriculture.*

## **Introduction**

Nigeria's agricultural development policy over the years has been informed by the belief that the development of agriculture is a sine qua non for the overall growth and development of the economy. This understanding constituted the basis of all efforts made in the planning and designing of programmes and projects to ensure the growth in the sector. The main thrust of agricultural development efforts, therefore, has been to enhance and sustain the capacity of the sector to play this assigned role, with particular emphasis on the attainment of a sustainable level in the production of basic food commodities, and agriculture raw materials to meet the needs of an expanding industrial sectors. It also involved the development of viable agricultural research libraries with a strong mandate to provide information services and resources to meet the information services and resources needs of researchers and other stakeholders in agriculture (Faris, 1991). Faris further maintained that it is in recognition of the importance of information services and resources in agricultural research and development efforts, that Nigeria established libraries in all the 18 agricultural research institutes and the 3 universities of agriculture as information support systems (ISS).

These agricultural research libraries are organizational mechanisms designed essentially to link groups of students, lecturers/researchers, and scientists that are committed to sharing information or working together to solve agricultural problems and to use existing resources, Halis (1995) refers to agricultural research libraries as all libraries/information centres established under the auspices of Agricultural Research Institutes, including Universities of Agriculture set aside for the use of students, lecturers, researchers, and practitioners in agriculture and related areas. The emphasis for the agricultural research libraries is the dissemination of specialized information primarily devoted to a special discipline, offering specialized services to specialized clientele. These agricultural research libraries are expected to acquire, organize, preserve and disseminate information as well as to improve, stimulate and guide research in agriculture by co-ordinating the efforts of research findings in agriculture and also setting in motion interaction and better working relation between producers and consumers of agricultural research.

Nicke and Ayola (2004) reported that 81 government and higher education agencies engaged in agricultural research in Nigeria in 2000, together they employed over 1,352 full time equivalent researchers and spent 3.6 billion naira in 1999 on agricultural research and development equivalent to \$106 million in 1993 international price: yet the rate of growth and development of agricultural sector has in the recent past not been encouraging.

A more important factor responsible for low agricultural production is related to the fact that researchers/lecturers, students, extension workers and other stakeholders are not adequately provided with information services and resources that would improve agricultural production. The published literature on agriculture and allied sciences is scattered over a variety of documents viz, books, journals, newsletters, internet, conference papers etc, thus packing the widely dispersed agricultural information is a challenge to researchers and

other stakeholders in agricultural development. The necessity to sustaining agricultural production rests squarely on the quality and effective information services and resources provision. Agricultural research libraries remain societal mechanisms designed essentially for the provision of needed information services and resources for high quality agricultural productivity. However, it has been observed that agricultural research libraries in Nigeria are not satisfactorily providing information services and resources requirement for agricultural research and development. It is useful therefore to identify the factors that attribute to the in effective performance of agricultural research libraries in Nigeria.

The objectives of this paper therefore are to:

1. State the need for effective information services and resources provision.
2. Identify the framework for assessing the performance of agricultural research libraries.
3. examine major issues/factors that attribute to the poor performance of agricultural research libraries in Nigeria.
4. Highlight the way forward for effective agricultural library performance in Nigeria.

### **The Need for Effective Library and Information Services for Agriculture in Nigeria**

Access to and utilization of information on research, production and prices is one of the keys to survival of today's agriculture. Generally, availability and utilization of information make the research, production and marketing environment more equitable for all who are part of the food and agricultural production system, but it is of particular benefit to farmers who cannot afford their own sources of information. One of the primarily goals of agricultural

library system has traditionally been to improve quantity and quality of information on agricultural research and production. According to United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) (2007), this information policy thrust is rooted in the recognition that:

- ❖ Access to improved information resources helps everyone involved in the agricultural and food production, research, marketing, consumption system etc, make more informed and economically rational decisions. For example, information on prices, price trends and forecasts is crucial to producers and marketing in making decisions on what to produce and when to market.
- ❖ Improved information results in a more equal balance of power among research institutions, firms in a market etc. information is research and market power. This is probably most recognized in the extensive and highly sophisticated information systems that have been developed by multi-national companies. Most researchers and farmers, marketers however, do not as individual have the resources to develop or purchase information in that manner. The provision for public information (eg. agricultural libraries) bridges that gap and thus results in more balanced bargaining relationship with research organization and market.
- ❖ Improved information results in more efficient research and market coordination. Information on the quantity o f products available and expected to be produced provided signals to decision makers researchers etc. up and down the market channel. Information thus becomes at least a partial substitute for vertical integration (Knutson and Penn, 2005).

### **Framework for Evaluating Agricultural Library Performance in Nigeria**

Although selectivity bias and methodological problems have clouded the measurement of the performance of agricultural research libraries in Nigeria,

there are general agreement about their inadequate contribution to agricultural research and development efforts in Nigeria. The debate centres more on problems of zero funding, ineffective services, provision and delivery, inability to acquire current publication and journal cancellation, etc (Deji, 2005). Frant (2010) maintained that library and information system has definable tasks or services (e.g. internet services, circulation services, photocopying services, current awareness services, etc.) and he is of the view that the interaction of these services and their dynamics over time is very important for effective agricultural library and information service delivery)).

It is therefore possible to see how successful these tasks and services are been carried out to satisfactorily meet the needs and demands of library clientele. The performance of these services could therefore serve as framework for ascertaining the overall performance of agricultural library system in Nigeria.

### **Evaluating Agricultural Library and Information Services and Issues explaining its poor performance**

A recent study by Uganneya (2010) based on the evaluation of the extent to which library and information services are provided to satisfy information needs of library users in six agricultural research libraries in Nigeria shows that only three library and information services had a mean score of 2.5 and above, indicating they were regularly provided. These services included: reference, circulation and photocopying, others that had mean score rating below 2.5 were CAS, internet, SDI, and ILL, indicating they were occasionally, sometimes or not provided at all. The share of satisfactory outcomes varies widely across basic services from a high of 2.8 mean rating score for reference and circulation services to a low of 2.4 and below mean rating score for current awareness, internet, inter library loan, photocopying and selective



dissemination of information services. The study however, highlighted several basic disturbing deficiencies in library and information services provision:

- ❖ Referral services was inadequately provided as the mean score rating of satisfaction was below 2.5
- ❖ Less than 2.5 mean score rating was assigned to shelf arrangement of books indicating a shelf failure.
- ❖ Both the library's ability to create awareness of the current library holding and the timely provision of journal table of content services were rated below 2.5 mean score.
- ❖ All individual services within SDI (e.g. user's research interest profile, response to user's feedback, relevant information delivery based on reference research profile, etc) were rated below 2.5.
- ❖ Almost 80% of individual internet services (e.g. access to e-journal/books, number of computers, numbers of search engineer, etc) suffered from the expectation of the users.
- ❖ Every individual service of ILL had a mean score rating of between 2.1 to 2.4, indicating high rate of inadequacies in ILLS delivery.

Another way of deducing the value of library and information services would be to find out whether researchers and other stakeholders have expressed demand for them. Pressure from interest groups and stakeholders in the form of petitions or strikes when the services have been discontinued would be a fair indicator of service quality (Gultman, 1980, Rose- Ackerman and Evanson 1985). It is instructive for example, that no strike took place in Nigeria ever since the government announced a substantial cut in public expenditures that would affect the agricultural library service budget,

whereas the concurrent announcement of a corresponding cut in financial support to universities or energy was met with a very violent strike.

The public lack of reaction suggest, limited interest, even apathy towards the service and obviously therefore calls into question its impact on the public or stakeholder's work and economic condition, because failure to react to removal or reduction of library services in general and agricultural library services in particular is common to most library services in the developing world, including Nigeria, it is likely that the services provided often leave users indifferent to them.

### **Constraints to the Performance of Agricultural Research Library and Information Services in Nigeria**

In an earlier study, Ochogwu (2007) had classified the issues explaining the ineffective performance of libraries in Nigeria which could also be applied to agricultural libraries into two basic headings. These are internalities and externalities. The internalities are those unresolved problems that are internal to the library profession while the externalities are those outside forces that hinder effective library and information service delivery. In this study, these two basic headings and others are collapsed together as follows:

#### **i. The nature of library and information practitioners**

According to Ochogwu (2007), there are basically three types of library and information practitioners in Nigeria – the passive, the reactive and the proactive. The passive are those practitioners who concentrate on the collection development with little or no emphasis on use. The reactive welcome users into the library and react to their demand and needs by finding answers to their information problem, while the proactive are those practitioners who diagnose and customize information needs of the

community they service. Unfortunately, the passive and reactive form the majority of library and information practitioners, while the proactive are the minority. As long as the proactive are in the minority, effective library and information service delivery will be an illusion to Nigerians.

## ii. Lack of political and economic power

The library profession lacks the political and economic power to compete for relevant and recognition in the community of other professionals. In Nigeria, the library profession has not adequately asserted its influence on the political and social process of the Nation; as a consequence, the value of library and information services has not been appreciated by Nigerians. Other services agencies and organizations in the educational, medical, legal are better recognized, appreciated and rewarded by Nigerians Worst still, every Dick and Harry are employed as librarian and are thereby making the profession a dumping ground (Ochogwu, 2007)

## iii. Availability and Accessibility of Library and Information Resources

Because information is meant to stimulate research, production and aid decision making, there is the need for availability and accessibility for effective utilization. French (1995) however, reported that limited access to global agricultural information resources, especially in developing countries including Nigeria, has resulted to the low productivity of the agricultural sector Mechanisms for linkages including union catalogue, indexing, abstracting and bibliographic works do almost not exist. Unless agricultural libraries provide access to available global information resources, the researchers, students

and other stakeholders in agricultural production and consumption will continue to suffer from information poverty.

#### iv. Lack of Broad-Based Information Resources Provision

The varied nature of real information resources needs makes its definition extremely difficult. However, a recent study by Technical Center for Agricultural and Rural Development CTA (2007) shows that within agriculture, there is a movement away from purely scientific and technical information matters to economic aspects and especially rural credits, small-scale business, marketing and organization and management of farmers' groups and cooperatives. CTA stated however that the shift in emphasis to obtaining a broad range of information is not due to disenchantment with science and technical matters, but that information packages must be of more global concern and include economic data, especially on market and market access, price and price changes as well as science and technical information. For effective library and information services delivery, the need for a broad based resource collection cannot be over-emphasized.

#### v. Poor Reward and Accountability Value

The library and information service has been designed in such a way that the outcome of the actions is not advantageous to the librarians. Without a stake in the outcome, the librarians will make little effort. "The amount of effort will likely depend on the values of a reward and the probability of receiving the reward. The perceived effort and probability of actually getting the reward are, in turn, also influenced by the record of actual performance" according to Porter and Lawler model of motivation (Koontz and Weirich, 1990; 372).

Accountability, which Kessides (1993; 17) defines as the ability of service providers to serve the interests of users and other financiers, also need to be built into the design of library and information service. Competitive marketers meet this criterion of accountability in that the profit oriented suppliers have the incentives to satisfy the demands of their customers. In the agricultural library environment, these incentives are lacking, data on performances are rarely collected or faulty, so potential reward cannot be related to any record of performance, and agricultural libraries in any case rarely offer performance based incentive to their employers. Consequently, little or no effort is likely to be expended towards satisfying clientele information demands and needs (Buckland, 1997).

#### vi. Poor funding

According to Ochogwu (2007), because of the lack of political and economic base that the library profession has not secured in Nigeria, coupled with the lack of appreciation of libraries and information among the citizens, governments over the years have not adequately funded the libraries for the training and retraining of librarians and for library development generally in terms of collection development. That outdated library materials, irregular service provision, staff irresponsiveness, lack of facilities, among others, are problems facing agricultural libraries; this not surprising since inadequate funding has been a perennial problem common to agricultural research institutes libraries in Nigeria. Iridon (1997) reported that the percentage of the agricultural research libraries recurrent budget was 0.45% for a period of five years which was below the minimum standard of 10% per year prescribed for agricultural libraries in Nigeria.

### **The Way Forward**

Three major developments have brought about a rethinking of the way(s) for delivery agricultural library and information services in Nigeria. First and foremost, fiscal crises and economy. Wide budget cutback often associated with global economic meltdown, have forced governments to make sharp reduction in the budget of agricultural research libraries. Financial sustainability and cost effectiveness have become the primary concern.

Secondly, the poor performance of agricultural research libraries, as reflected by the slow growth of agriculture in the recent past has spurred the search for better ways to improve agricultural library service delivery. Agricultural research libraries have been criticized for not doing enough, not doing it well, and for not being relevant. This failure was attributed to poor service design and implementation, as well as passive service delivery. As a result, agricultural library and information service delivery was inadequately funded and lacked a coherent link both with the user information needs and the agricultural research sector.

Thirdly, agriculture's dependence on more specialized knowledge/information and technologies has changed the economic character of the services delivered by agricultural libraries, especially the private concerned. The growing commercialization of agricultural information services and increased competitions in domestic and international markets have further strengthened the economic incentives of agricultural information providers to treat information service provision as another purchase input to agricultural production and marketing activities.

In view of the above developments and the bewildering problem bedeviling agricultural libraries services delivering in Nigeria, a way forward need to be sought for as follows:

- ❖ Proactive and reactive information service delivery is highly advocated by librarians through the process of diagnosis and community surveys. The nature and quality of the information provided would therefore have a bearing on the users' needs and satisfaction. Timeliness, reliability and relevance are basic desirable characteristics.
- ❖ An urgent need for library and information science professionals to enhance their political and economic base/power in such a way that the policy makers and politicians would appreciate importance of library and information service delivery on national development agenda and agriculture in particular. The challenge therefore, is for the librarians to produce valid models in which the socio-economic impact of agricultural librarians and information service activities could be assessed. If such impact can be demonstrated to politicians and decision makers, resource allocators etc, it would increase the support for agricultural libraries.
- ❖ A workable networking among agricultural research libraries is advocated, this will enhance the availability and accessibility of information resources to users in a broad based nature. Also, there is need for agricultural research libraries in Nigeria to collaborate with already established agricultural information services network (eg international agricultural information service network)(AGLINET), a network of "elite" libraries of the world which offers inter-library loan and photocopying services to agricultural member libraries in both developed and developing countries.
- ❖ Library and information service should be designed in such a way that a workable reward system to the librarians as stakeholder be accommodated. Incentives for performances also need to be built into the design of library and information services. These incentives and rewards would motivate the

librarians to be accountable to their clientele and also serve as drive for quality service delivery.

- ❖ The funding environment of agricultural research libraries in Nigeria has been very difficult that alternative sources need to be sought for to support the ever dwindling government funding. In view of the global commercialization of information provision in agricultural sector, there is the need to change fees for service provision. This study is also advocating for the participation of private information providers in agricultural sector. As the situation is, it seems reasonable to say that the public agricultural libraries alone cannot provide information services/resources to service agricultural research and development needs of the nation.
- ❖ Government should establish a commission for agricultural library systems in Nigeria. This commission should be responsible for funding, policy formulation and implementation and evaluation of the quality of information service/resources provision by agricultural libraries in Nigeria.

## **Conclusion**

It seems reasonable to say that library and information services provision hold great potential as powerful and reusable resources for the development of agriculture in Nigeria. It is an essential input, catalyst, and products of change. Library and information service provision can be a precious fuel in the process of transformation of agriculture in Nigeria. Despite this impressive potential, however, there are much economic, manpower, political and other constraints that prevent it from being realized. It therefore recommended that librarians should be proactive in information service delivery, alternative funding mechanism should be sought for to support the dwindling government funding in terms of fees changed for services delivery and a need for private participation in agricultural information provision in



view of the global commercialization of information services provision and agricultural information services provision in particular.

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