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**The Role of Extension Workers in the Provision of Information
To Small-Scale Crop Farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area, Enugu
State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This article presents Findings of a study conducted to explore the role of extension workers in the provision of information to small-scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria.

The study made use of the survey techniques to collect data from the respondents. A total of 50 farmers were surveyed from a population of 262.

The result produced 25 respondents by purposive sampling who were actively involved in the extension programme representing 50% response rate.

The study revealed that farmers required a variety of information for their various agricultural activities as per application of fertilizers, seed treatment, control of pests and diseases as well as the production technology. The study established that several problems hinder farmers to adequately utilize information to improve their farming. These problems include poor definition needs, poor access to information, inappropriate media and lack of capacity to use modern technology. The study recommended that information needs of farmers could be ameliorated by targeting research to those needs of the farmers, improving the mode of information dissemination, a continuous evaluation/assessment of farmers' information needs, regular training/education for farmers to enhance their economic activities.

Although the study was limited to the provision of information to small scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, it is believed that the outcome of this investigation has added another empirical knowledge to the existing literature in the field to benefit researchers, extension workers and all stakeholders in agricultural extension organizations within Africa and other Asian countries of the world.

Key words: Information, information needs, agricultural information, extension workers, small-scale farmers, Oji-River, Enugu State, Nigeria

Introduction

Agriculture generally plays a significant role in regional, national and international development. Its importance to communities, countries and the world at large cannot be over-emphasized. It is strategic and critical to both the developed and developing countries in terms of growth of the national economy, gross domestic product (G.D.P) and foreign exchange earnings. The livelihood

of the citizenry in the world especially those dwelling in the rural communities depend upon the development of agriculture (FAO, 2018). Their daily activities for life sustenance hinges primarily on the work they do in farming, trading and fishing.

According to Rabindra (2012), Adesina (2013), World Bank (2019), agriculture is a prime sector which largely sustains the national economy, contributing significantly to the improvement of overall economy especially in the third world countries (FAO, 2018).

In Nigeria, agriculture is the prime occupation of the citizenry. It employs about 75% of the labour force, provides over 80% of food products consumed in the country and supplies at least 50% of raw materials needed in the country for industrial development (Rabindra, 2012) Adesina (2013), FAO (2017). Given its strategic importance to the national economy and wealth

Creation, Nigeria Federal Government took pivotal measures to improve agricultural productivity to encourage investors in the food industry with subsidies on domestic rice production, tomato pastes, cassava flour/sorghum with several financial incentives to promote agricultural sector. Significantly, in the last national budgeting for economic development in the country during the current fiscal year (2021), both agriculture and rural development were given a priority attention in the allocation of resources to improve the welfare of people and create jobs to lift majority out of poverty especially those residing in the rural areas. This is a good thing to happen because generation of decent jobs for the greater number of population is one of the criteria for assessing any growing economy Adesina (2012), Rabindra (2012). According to Oboh, (2016), gainful employment increases workers' incomes, human dignity and self- respect which are critical for earning a fulfilled livelihood. To FAO, it notes that job provision for people is the greatest panacea for social problems afflicting any nation arising from extreme hunger and poverty due to unavailability of essential food products FAO, (2017).

Information Needs of Small Scale Farmer in Oji-River LGA

Economically, the use of information to develop agriculture cannot be emphasized. As a matter of fact, all farmers including small-scale, cooperative and commercial farmers need to know the resources of increasing their output, the use of fertilizers, improved seedlings and marketing strategies in order to increase in their level of production (Rabindra, 2017). According to Rabindra, research institutes act as strategic agents in effecting positive changes that would facilitate agricultural productivity. This brings about a development in the sector as these institutes according to Gartforth (2010) conduct researches on needs assessment of farmers to know how

they would be effectively served. The main objective of the needs assessment is to discover the priority of farmers as regards their information needs so that they can be provided with the appropriate information which would promote their agricultural practice (FAO, 2017). In reality, how this aim is achieved to solve the problem of farmers is scarcely attainable due to inadequacy of extension workers who constitutes the major government personnel in any agricultural extension Ozowa, (1995).

In Nigeria, the agricultural extension systems practiced to assist farmers is the training and visiting (T&V) model which was introduced and promoted by the World Bank in the third world countries to revamp agriculture. (Adesson, 2007). The World Bank report concluded that the training and visiting (T&V) model was not only attractive to farmers but also offered them opportunities to know how to apply and use new innovations that will increasingly bring about their agricultural productivity. The philosophy behind this model is to help farmers help themselves who are working on their agricultural farms to increase food products (FAO, 2018).

Information Needs of Small-Scale Farmers in Oji-River farming Community.

The main investigation in the case of Oji-River farming communities was to find out the information needs of farmers in agriculture and how these needs would be met so that the productivity of farmers will be substantially improved. In this context, the study sought to find out the following issues as regards to farmers' crop productivity. Issues examined includes:-

- i. Types of information required
- ii. How farmers solve their information needs
- iii. Whom farmers consult to solve their farming problems
- iv. How often farmers obtained assistance from the extension workers
- v. Areas in which farmers have failed to obtain assistance from the extension workers

Objectives of the study

1. *Find out the information needs of small-scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area.*
2. *Establish the methods used for the dissemination of agricultural information by extension workers.*
3. *Determine the obstacles to effective agricultural information delivery services to small-scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area.*

Research Questions

1. What are the information needs of small-scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area?
2. What are methods used for the dissemination of agricultural information by extension workers?
3. What are the obstacles to effective agricultural information delivery services in Oji-River Local Government Area?

Methodology: This study adopted the survey method of investigation. The study used questionnaires and interview as instruments for data collection. As a descriptive study, purposive sampling was used to administer a total of fifty (50) questionnaires to extension workers and a structured interview of twenty-five (25) small-scale farmers were conducted to obtain the results. However, at the time of the study, the number of small-scale farmers in the community were estimated to be two hundred and sixty two (262). Those registered with Agricultural and Rural Development Programme (ARDP) and who were active in their involvement with extension workers were 50. These therefore formed the study population. Extension workers were fifty (50). Table 1 presents this.

Table 1: Study population of Oji-River small-scale farmers and extension workers

No. of small-scale farmers	No. of extension workers	Total study population
50	50	100

Source: Agricultural and Rural Development Programme (ARDP), pp.1-9, 2013.

1. Types of information required by small-scale farmers

i.	Credit facilities and loans.....	8 (32.0%)
ii.	Pests and disease control.....	3 (12.0%)
iii.	Input Management.....	2 (8.0%)
iv.	Pests and hazard control.....	2 (8.0%)
v.	Chemicals for preservation.....	2 (8.0%)
vi.	Weather forecasts	2 (8.0%)
vii.	Storage and preservation.....	2 (8.0%)
viii.	Weeds control and soil fertility.....	1 (4.0%)
ix.	Market information.....	2 (8.0%)

Discussion and findings

As can be seen from the information needs of the farmers, they require information in order to improve in their agricultural practice. According to World Bank (2017), agricultural high yield depends to a large extent on how successfully information was communicated, understood and applied by the farmers. The food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 2018). Observed that information was very important for both agricultural and rural development and that providing basic information to farmers for crop cultivation meant raising their level of agricultural productivity.

On the information needs of small-scale farmers in Oji-River Local Government Area, the investigation revealed various areas in which agricultural farmers needed information and the type of information they required in order to enhance their crop productivity. The results showed that 8(32.0%) respondents indicated for credit facilities and loans, 3(12.0%) identified pests and diseases control, 2(8.0%) input management and 2(8.0%) pests and hazards control. Other areas information is required includes preservation of chemicals 2 (8.0%), weather forecasts 2(8.0%), storage and preservation 1(4.0%), weeds and soil fertility 1(4.0%), while market information was indicated by 2(8.0%).

The above result obviously revealed the fact that farmers in Oji-River farming community had need of information in their farming activities. Information is critical to agriculture and cannot be neglected in the scheme of economic development. This study supported the World Bank (2017) assertion that agricultural increase depend upon farmers' appropriate information utilisation to

their agricultural activities. The usefulness of information in the production of food crops cannot be under-estimated. It is inevitable to the farmers' competencies and skills in achieving optimal output FAO, 2018.

2. How farmers solve their information needs.

Obviously, the problem of productivity begins when farmers lack the appropriate information that would help them realize their farming project. Therefore, the researcher was interested in knowing the sources of information of farmers and how their basic information needs were solved

Table 2: sources of Farmers' information needs

Kind of information	Nature of response	Number of responses	Percent
Attending an extension meeting	Never	25	100.0
Participating an extension meeting	Always	25	100.0
Listening to a radio programme	Never	25	100.0
Being visited by extension worker	Sometimes	15	60.0
Reading extension pamphlets	Never	25	100.0
Visiting a fellow farmer/ friends	Sometimes	15	60.0
Visiting an agricultural library	Never	25	100.0
Depending on personal experience	Always	25	100.0

From the responses in Table 2, it is evident that farmers mostly depended on participating in a field day meetings and personal experience always for their information needs which was indicated by 100% while 15(60.0%) sometimes relied on participating in a field day meeting and visiting fellow farmers/friends for their sources of information. It was also noted that attending an extension meeting, listening to radio programmes and visiting an agricultural libraries had never been farmers' sources of obtaining information. From this analysis therefore, it could be gathered that farmers had a limited knowledge of information which would have helped them meet their information needs.

The World Bank (2017) and FAO (2018) observed this problem by reporting that inaccessibility of farmers to relevant sources of agricultural information will directly or indirectly hamper their agricultural productivity.

3. Whom farmers consulted to solve their farm problems

Table 3: Sources of Farmers' Assistance

Sources of assistance	No. of responses	Percent
Extension workers	15	60.0
Fellow farmers/friends	5	20.0
Government officials	5	20.0
Total	25	100.0

Generally, ignorance to sources of information will lead to poor performances which will in turn affect the level of crop productivity FAO, (2018). However, to progress in agriculture, farmers need guidance and direction especially on new innovations relating to their farming.

Findings revealed that 15(60.0%) of farmers solved their farm problems by consulting extension workers while minority 5(20.0%) chose consulting government officials in agricultural agencies for their problems.

Obviously, the very purpose of farmers consulting extension workers/government agricultural officers was for them to receive instructions or counseling on how to improve their farming. This opportunity will also enable extension workers/government officials understand their problems and know how adequately their information needs could be met.

4. How often farmers obtained assistance from the extension workers

Table 4: period farmers obtained their assistance

Period farmer obtained assistance	Frequency	Percent
Very often	5	20.0
Often	4	16.0
Sometimes	10	40.0
Rarely	2	8.0
Never	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

From table 4, the period in which farmers obtained their assistance can be shown. 10(40.0%) indicated they received assistance sometimes, 2(8.0%) indicated that they rarely obtained assistance, 5(20.0%) said very often did, while 4(16.0%) said they had never obtained assistance from extension workers. However, what this finding has revealed was the fact that farmers' assistance from their intermediaries was irregular. The negative effect of this situation was reported by Olowu and Yahaya (1998) who submitted that the problem of inadequate information services to farmers could undermine their potentials, if not checked would lead to poor harvest and low income generation.

Table 5: Areas Farmers failed to get assistance from the Extension Workers

Period farmer obtained assistance	Frequency	Percent
Very often	5	20.0
Often	4	16.0
Sometimes	10	40.0
Rarely	2	8.0
Never	4	16.0
Total	25	100.0

Small scale farmers need to be assisted in their agriculture by extension workers. It was believed that since farmers' problems were brought to extension workers, this could also reveal some of the information needs of farmers and areas in which they had not received assistance.

From the record in Table 5, areas in which farmers had not obtained help from the extension workers were clearly shown. 10(40.0%) indicated new technologies as the area they had not received assistance, 5(20.0%) identified the preservation of chemicals, 3 (12.0%) reported storage and preservation while 5 (20.0%) mentioned land/farm spacing. Only 2(8.0%) of the interviewed farmers admitted to the use of fertilizer application.

Conclusion

Information is inevitable to agriculture and food productivity. Farmers in Oji-River local Government Area (L.G.A) need information especially on diseases and pests control, soil fertility, fertilizer application, seed varieties, credit facilities, input resources as well as innovative technologies for their agricultural work. As was discovered in the study, most farmers obtained their information sources through friends/fellow farmers, relatives and field-day meetings which were not sufficient for their agricultural productivity. Farmers should be encouraged to access new technological innovations on agriculture which are critical to both crop growth and agricultural productivity.

Recommendation

To improve crop productivity in Oji-River L.G.A, the following suggestions are proffered;-

- i. Farmers' information needs as regards to crop productivity should be reviewed. The Agricultural Development Agency (ADA) Oji-River, L.G.A should see that farmers' information needs are met by transmitting those needs of farmers to research institutes in order to enhance their crop productivity.
- ii. Extension programmes/education should be held by the Agricultural and Rural Development Programme (ARDP) for extension workers/farmers to encourage them adopt new innovations which will improve agricultural productivity.
- iii. There is the need also to improve the mode of information dissemination. The ARDP should ensure that effective information delivery systems for farmers are put in place to enable them access the appropriate information to enhance productivity.
- iv. The government of Enugu State should provide adequate funds for extension programmes/training in the state and also assist the extension officers to reach farmers in rural areas of the state to promote agriculture.

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