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The Importance of Agricultural Extension Agents As Source of Information In Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State North Central Zone, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study attempted to determine the most importance sources of farm information to farmers and why one of these sources (Extension agents) were considered the most important source of farm information in North Central Zone (NAERLS/ABU) in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State. A total of 200 household heads were interviewed. The findings showed that agricultural extension agents were the most important source of information by 50% of the farmers. A number of reasons were given by the farmers for regarding extension agents as the most important source of information. Some of these reasons would be of help to agricultural information practitioners and agricultural extension specialists when designing the most appropriate information of extension strategy for rural farmers

Keywords: Extension Agent, Farmers, Information

Introduction

The importance of information has been emphasized by Nauta (1972). He was of the view that information is news what is known already is no information therefore, something is information to the extent that is unknown, unexpected or surprising. If this hold for agricultural information, then its importance on agricultural development could be enormous, provided the farmers are ready to understand, accept and implement such information. The person or persons who supply the information to the farmers is the agricultural communicator and the process of relaying the information to the farmer is called Agricultural Extension.

Falusi (2011) has defined agricultural information as proven idea, technology or any information which comes as a direct result of research activity or government policy designed to educate the farmers on policy issue which would enhance their financing activities. Hence it implies that for farmers in rural areas to keep pace with the fast development taking place in modern agricultural practices, they must be aware of source of information that are available to them. They must also be able to decide which of the information source is the most important and why is the most important. This type of study has not been conducted or assessed in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State, this is one justification for conducting this study.

Past studies on sources of farm information in the United States include the one conducted by Adebayo *et al.*; (2004). This study classified sources of farm information into eight namely:

1. Mass Media (that is farm bulletin, magazines and papers)
2. Radio

3. printing extension that is circular letters and bulletin
 4. Television programmes by Agricultural Agencies and Parastatals
 5. Oral extension, that is, office calls, meetings, farm visits, method demonstrations, tours and field days
 6. Peer influence, that is neighbors, friends and relatives
 7. Commercial media, This includes both printed and oral sources of information and
 8. The classroom which include vocational agriculture and veteran's training.
- Sources of farm information have also been classified based on personal and impersonal sources Beal and Rogers (1960).

Personal sources of information are relatives, friends, neighbors, landlords and direct contact with extension agents. Impersonal sources include farm Magazines, Newspapers, Radio, Television and University bulletins

In Nigeria, Falusi (2007) reported for sources of farm information in Northern Nigeria, namely:

1. Agricultural "Mallam" or extension workers
2. Agricultural shows
3. Agricultural films
4. Agricultural demonstration farm

Also, Falusi (2011) found that sources of farm information in Northern States of Nigeria can be classified under three main heading namely:

1. Traditional meetings such as wedding, naming and harvest ceremonies and also discussions with traditional leaders of occupational leaders
2. Official sources, this includes government ministries and local government authorities which use different media to communicate to the people
3. Commercial sources, whereby commercial firms use lorries and vans equipped with public address system to advertise their product, such products include insecticides, pesticide and fungicides. The vans or lorries go round on market days from one market to another selling their products

Akinbode and Clark (1968) reported that farmers in Western State of Nigeria found helpful the extension officers, the leaders of farm co-operatives and occasionally a "successful farmer" as their sources of farm information. Although the radio and Newspapers provided some general information about farming, the farmers reported that they did not receive specific help with their individual problems from these sources pertaining to the adoption of three farm practices introduced in the area.

Yahaya (2005) reported that extension workers, radio, village head, other farmers, company salesman and friends were identified as farmers sources of farm information.

Jacob *et al.*, (1984) reported radio was by far the most important sources of information in Bida Agricultural development project in Niger State. This was followed by visits to farm service centres and extension agents. Others include visit

to demonstration plot, traders, village leaders, other farmers and village agricultural committee members.

Method of The Study

Data for this paper was derived from study of male household heads in villages which are under the Bida Agricultural Development project zone area in Niger State. The names of the villages are Sachi, Ndawangwa and Chanchaga. The criteria used for selecting the villages was that they are all accessible by road. However, the three villages lie along Bida-Abuja major high way road.

Data on population size of each village were obtained from the secretariat of the local government population commission.

A list of household heads were compiled from population commission register obtained from National population commission of local government secretariat. A modified version of a simple random sample known as systematic selection was used in selecting the respondents for the study. This version is a method of selecting units from a list or a proxy list, Warwick and Liniger (1975). In this study a proxy list of rows of houses found side by side a street was used. Each sixth houses heads were interviewed in each village, in all 200 household heads were interviewed in the three villages. Tables and percentage were the statistical methods employed for the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the most importance source of information according to the farmers. Fifty percent (50%) of the farmer considered extension workers as the most importance source of farm information. The second most important source of information was by radio which was followed by information from neighbours. The fourth most important source of information were by friends and relatives as 5.7% considered this source to be the most important.

Table 1: The Most Important Source of Farm Information

Source of farm information	Number of farmers	Percentage (%)
Radio	50	25
Extension workers	90	50
Pamphlets/News letters	1	0.7
Neighbours	32	12.2
Friends and relative	10	5.7
Other farmers	4	1.7
Others	4	1.7
None	6	3.0
Total	200	100

Three percent (3.0%) of the respondents reported that none of the given sources of farm information were important to them. About 1.7% reported that other sources of farm information not included on the interview schedule were the most important sources of information to them. These sources according to the respondents include mobile ministry of information and what the respondents regarded as their own local method of information. 0.7% of the respondent considered pamphlets/Newsletters the most important source of farm information.

This finding is somewhat consistent with that of Akinbode and Clark (1968) who found that farmers in Western State of Nigeria found helpful the extension officers as their source of farm information. The finding is also consistent with that of Yahaya (2005) who found that extension workers were identified first by farmers as their source of farm information in Nigeria. The finding is also consistent with that of Fasassi (2007) who found that agricultural extension officer was the source of information identified most frequently about sources of information on improved farming practices in some selected areas of Western Nigeria.

The above findings have shown that extension workers supply the most useful farm information in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State. Fifty percent (50%) of the respondents regarded this source as the most important.

This is so, probably, because the study are lies within Bida Agricultural Development project zone area and therefore, the respondents are in contact with higher number of extension workers that usual in other areas.

Table 2 shows the reasons why the 50% who considered extension workers as the most important source of farm information did so. Extension workers have been chosen for consideration because it forms the highest percentage in comparism with the other sources of farm information.

Table 2: Reasons given for choosing extension workers as the most important source of farm information

Reasons Given	Number	Percentage (%)
1. The extension workers is my friend and we are always together	17	28
2. The extension worker explain in detail and demonstrated for us to see, since he has the technical knowhow.	21	35.3
3. I always feel free to go to him when I need advice on farming matters	4	6.0
4. He lives with us in the village and so we trusted him as giver of farm information	13	17
5. He used to follow us to our farms to teach us how to practice modern farming	5	13
Total	60	100.0

About 35% of those who considered extension workers the most important source did so because workers explained in detail and demonstrated for the farmers to see since the extension worker had the technical knowhow.

Twenty Eight 28% considered the extension workers as the most important because they were considered by the farmers as their friends and that they were always together or always interacting with them and therefore understood each other better. Seventeen percent 17% claimed that they considered extension workers most important because the extension worker lived with them in the village and so they trust them as disseminators of farm information. Over 13.7% claimed that the extension workers used to follow them to their farms to teach them how to practice modern farming, this was why they regard extension workers as the most important source of farm information.

Six percent (6%) regarded extension workers as the most important source of farm information because they felt free to approach them whenever they want advice on farming matters.

On-farm research to explain and demonstrate new agricultural practices to rural farmers or farm demonstrations should be encouraged to improve on agricultural productivity of rural uniformed farmers. The finding further shows that in order for extension workers to convince the rural farmers, they must interact with them and know how best to approach them to get the desired results. In this way, the farmers will also develop favourable report with the extension workers and ask them useful questions at any time when the needed arises. The findings also shows that extension workers should be people who will be able to live in the rural environment where water, good road and all other essential amenities are absent. The finding also showed that extension workers should be people who are willing or ready to pay farm visits to the farmers.

Conclusion

This study has been able to show the most important sources of farm information to farmers in Lavun Local Government Area of Niger State. The study has taken the most important source which was agricultural extension workers and determined why farmers regarded this particular source as the most important source of farm information.

The reason given by farmers for choosing agricultural extension workers as the most important source of farm information would be of help to agricultural information practitioners and agricultural extension specialists when designing the most appropriate information or extension strategy for rural farmer.

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