APPRAISAL ON INFORMATION–SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF RURAL WOMEN FARMERS IN JOS SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The survey was conducted to assess information – seeking behaviour of Rural Women Farmers in Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. Data were collected from a sample of two hundred and sixty-one (261) respondents using a questionnaire. Frequency, percentage and mean score were used for data analysis. Results indicate that the respondents obtained information mostly from informal sources which include family members (78.1%), other women farmers (76.6%), relatives (70.5%), friends (70.1%), educated individuals (69.7%), husband (68.6%), neighbours (62.4%). Information needs of the respondents were preservation of harvested crops ($\bar{x}$ =3.13), animal treatment ($\bar{x}$ =3.04), new agricultural technologies ($\bar{x}$ = 3.02), planting time and techniques ($\bar{x}$ = 3.01), crop production ($\bar{x}$ 2.99), weeding techniques ($\bar{x}$ = 2.96), trend in food production ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94), farm input acquisition ($\bar{x}$ = 2.78), processing techniques ($\bar{x}$ = 2.73), storage practices and storage facilities ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), marketing and market price ($\bar{x}$ = 2.69). The study further shows that the respondents sought information from other women farmers (80.8%), family members (70.1%), friends (67.8%), community leaders (67.0%), relatives (62.8%), personal experience (55.9%), husbands (53.6%) and extension officers when in need of information (51.7%). The study recommends that rural women farmers in the study area should be sensitized and encouraged to source and seek agricultural information from sources other than informal sources.

Keywords: **Information Needs, Information Seeking- Behaviour, Information Sources, Rural Women, Farmers**

Introduction

Over the years, reports across different countries of the world including Nigeria gave credence to the productivity and capability of women's involvement in agricultural in rural society, state and nation at large which were found to exhibit greater potentials and constitute the bulk of the world's food producers (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2007). The role rural women play and their position in meeting the challenges of agricultural production, growth and development are quite central and outstanding. Rural women's contribution in agriculture and rural society cannot be over highlighted mainly in the areas of food security and agricultural growth. Most women who reside in rural areas have agriculture as their main occupation and depend on it for their survival.

In sub-Saharan Africa rural women participate significantly in rural development (Oyeniyi and Olofinasawe, 2015). Onyenechere (2008) documented that over 80% of rural women in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria are economically active in

one agricultural activity or the other. Women account for the greater part of the population of any developing countries such as Nigeria. Rural women go beyond crop production to other agricultural aspects like fisheries, rabbitry, poultry as well as sheep and goat rearing (Ironkwe and Ekwe, 2005). Women farmers experience lack of access to resources globally in form of information, training, production, agro-inputs, labour and credit (USAID, 2012). This has a posed great challenge to women in their effort to improve their economic position where farming is concerned. Women do not have access to adequate resources and opportunities needed to make them productive. Munya (2000) observed that the lack of reliable and comprehensive information for rural women is a major hindrance to agricultural development.

Information in the words of Wulystan (2012) is the corner-stone of successful socio-economic development since it plays a key role in decision making. Information among the farming community has widely been acknowledged as one of the critical factors for efficient and effective agricultural decision-making. It is the knowledge needed to answer some question faced by people in their daily lives. Information as an enterprise is important for the production process of agricultural production and marketing of agro-produce (Achugbue and Anie, 2001).

Agriculture has been and continues to be a principal engine of economic growth in most developing economies of the world (Mohammed and Shweta, 2014). For any nation to improve its agricultural productivity and ensure food security, access to information and awareness programs on agricultural practices is the key. Information and good knowledge of modern agricultural technology and its usage will enable improved cultivation, harvesting and storage which will reduce famine and improve nations all round wealth (Sokoya, Adefunke and Fagbola, 2014). Agricultural information enhances farming decision and sustains growth of agricultural activities. Agricultural information constitutes information in all aspects of agriculture which could either be published or unpublished (Lwoga, Christine and Patrik, 2001).

Rural women farmers in Nigeria rarely feel the impact of agricultural innovation either due to lack of access or poor dissemination of such vital information. This has become a key constraint or limitation to agricultural development in the country (Sokoya et al., 2014). Agricultural development like every other development activity hinge on information. It is one of the appropriate tools which can be relied upon to increase food pattern. Access to adequate information is very essential to increase agricultural productivity (Oyeniyi and Olofinasawe, 2015). Aina (2007) noted that the least expensive input for improving rural agricultural development is adequate access to knowledge and information in areas of new agriculture technologies, early warning systems (drought, pest, disease etc), improved seedlings, fertilizer, credit, market price etc.

Women are the foundation of most communities in Nigeria. About 1.6 billion women live in rural areas and they produce more than half of the food that is grown in the world, specifically, up to 80% in Africa and 60% in Asia (IFAP and women farmers). Yet women are usually disadvantaged in access to all factors of production and processing, gaining access to and using information in spite of their involvement in general agriculture (Ani, 2004; Oyeniyi and Olofinasawe, 2015). The study therefore is set to assess information – seeking behaviours of rural women farmers in Jos South LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. identify sources of agricultural information available for rural women farmers in the study area;
ii. determine information needs of rural women farmers in the study area; and
iii. determine information-seeking behavior of rural women farmers in the study area.

Literature Review

Agricultural sector is the back bone of many economies in Africa but most African countries are thus far, to devout their effort to the dissemination information and modern knowledge on agriculture to rural areas, where 70 to 80 per cent of the African population lives (Inusa et al., 2018). For any nation to improve its agricultural productivity and ensure food security, access to information and awareness programs on agricultural practices is the key (Oyeniyi and Olofinsawe, 2015). Information on good knowledge of modern agricultural technology and its usage as specified by Sokoya, *et al*. (2014) will enable improved cultivation, harvesting and storage that will reduce famine and improve the nations all round wealth. Agricultural information constitutes information in all aspects of agriculture which could either be published or unpublished; however, it enhances farming decision and sustains growth of agricultural activities (Soyemi, 2014).

Egwu and Igwe (2013) noted that farmers in Nigeria seldom feel the impact of agricultural innovation either due to lack of access or poor dissemination of such vital information. Currently in the country, Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) is a major channel used for ensuring the availability of agricultural information to farmers whether rural or urban, typically referred to as extension service (Soyemi, 2014). Mohammed and Shwela (2014) opined that the performance of human activities depends on information availability, access and utilization. Banmeke and Ajayi (2006) posit that information is one of the basic human needs after air, water, food and shelter. This makes information very crucial for everyday living of people around the world enabling people to relate with one another.

Dolnad (2002) reiterated that the agricultural sector in developing countries is increasingly becoming knowledge intensive. Researchers at the global, regional and national levels continue to generate new information. Yet as agricultural systems become more complex, farmers' access to a reliable timely and relevant information source is critical to farmers' competitiveness. Diekmann *et al*. (2009) postulated that information must be relevant and meaningful to farmers, in addition to bring packaged and delivered in a way preferred by them.

Information sources are the physical (or digital) entities in a variety of media providing potential information and could encompass relevant information. These sources can also be distinguished as external and internal sources, human and documentary sources, or formal and informal sources (Ikonja-Odongo, 2002; Anoguku et al., 2017). Information could be accessed through various channels such as (colleagues and the Internet) or from various sources like (colleagues and text books) or through inter personal and intra personal sources. An information source contains relevant information whereas a channel guides the user to pertinent sources of information (Ikonja-Odongo, 2002; Anoguku et al., 2017)

An information need arises when an individual senses a problematic situation or information gap, in which his internal knowledge and beliefs, and model of the environment fail to suggest a path towards the satisfaction of his goals and interest (Donald, 2002).

Identification of such information need may lead to information-seeking and the formulation of requests for information (Donald, 2002; Wilson, 2006). The term "information need" hence does not automatically infer that people are "in need of" information as such but that the use of information can lead to the satisfaction of a more basic need. Information needs arise out of situations relating to a definite task that is linked with one or more of the work roles played by the professional. The information needs of the farmers are determined or categorized by the context (situation-specific need, internally or externally prompted), frequency (recurring or new need), predictability (anticipated or unexpected need), importance (degrees of urgency), and complexity (easily resolved or difficult) (Donald, 2002; Wilson, 2006). Agreeing with Oyeniyi and Olofinsawe (2015) other factors that can influence information needs include individual demographics or attributes and circumstances such as age, profession, specialisation, career stage, and geographic location.

Information-seeking behaviour is the "gap connecting procedure, where individuals make exchanges, influenced by information in time and space to reach desired outcomes" (Diekmann, Loibl and Batte, 2009). When an individual is confident about the availability of resources towards performing the behavior, he/she is strongly influenced to perform that behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Information-seeking behaviour refers to the way people search for and utilize information. Information behavior according to Wilson (2000) is the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information including both active and passive information-seeking and information-use. Information seeking behaviour is the thoughtful or deliberate search for facts as a value of a need to satisfy some ends. It is the micro level of behavior employed by the searcher in interrelating with information system of all kinds, be it between the seeker and the system or the pure method of creating and following up on a search (Munya, 2000; Diekmann et al., 2009). Information behaviour covers all aspects of human information behaviour, whether active or passive; it's the act of actively seeking information in order to answer a specific query (Wilson, 2002).

Information-seeking behavior is dynamic and non-linear which is experienced as a process of interplay of thoughts, feelings and action. It has been found to be connected to a variety of interpersonal communication behaviors beyond questions asking to include strategies such as candidates answer (Kuhlthau, 2011). A search for information may be linked to decision-making. The decision involved may vary from an inconsequential personal matter to a decision which affects billions or may have cumulative economic or political effects as individual buying or voting decisions may (Donald, 2002). The information-seeking behavior of the farmers is conditioned by the aspiration for information seeking and the capacity of the farmer to accumulate the social capital and the social learning skills. In addition, the contents needed and the sources of information will further refine the seeking behavior (Kuhlthau, 2011)).

Methodology

The study was carried out in Jos South Local Government Area (LGA), Plateau State, Nigeria. Jos South is one of the (17) LGAs in Plateau State with its headquarters in Bukuru. It has an estimated population of about 306,716 people (National Population Census (NPC), 2006). Jos South LGA has four (4) districts which are Vwang, Du, Gyel and Kuru. It is 15km south **of** the State capital Jos. The major ethnic group in the LGA is Berom and their major occupation is farming. It is

situated 4,000 feet (1,200 meters) above sea level. The area has very fertile soil suitable for crop production. It is known for the cultivation of a variety of crops such as maize, millet, "acha", guinea corn, potatoes and a variety of vegetables and fruits. It also has suitable climatic condition which favours the rearing of most animals.

The population of the study comprised all rural women farmers in the LGA. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Seventy-five (75) respondents were randomly selected from each of the four (4) districts, giving a total of three hundred (300) respondents used for the study. Data for this study were collected using well-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained three sections (A, B and C). Section A talked about sources of agricultural information available for rural women farmers, Section B discussed information–seeking behaviour of rural women farmers while Section C centered on agricultural information needs of rural women farmers in the study area. Out of the three hundred (300) copies of questionnaire administered, two hundred and sixty-one (261) were retrieved and used for analysis.

Objective one which considered sources of agricultural information available for rural women farmers was realized by asking the respondents to indicate with a tick the sources of agricultural information available to them. Objective two assessed agricultural information needs of the respondents. This was attained by asking the respondents to indicate with tick the information needs relevant to them. Objective three treated information–seeking behaviour of rural women farmers in the study area. This was achieved by asking the respondents to indicate with tick variables they "agree" or "disagree" to seek information from.

Question two was structured on a 4 point likert type of rating scale of "Strongly Agree (4points)", "Agree (3poins)", "Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). The values were added to obtain 10 which were further divided by 4 to give a mean of 2.5, therefore 2.5 was regarded as the cut-off mean for information–seeking behaviour and information needs of the respondents. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics involving percentage and mean score.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Sources of Agricultural Information available for Rural Women Farmers

The result in Table 1 revealed that family members (78.1%), other women farmers (76.6), relatives (70.5%), friends (70.1%), educated individuals (69.7%), husband (68.6%), neighbours (62.4%) among others were mostly sourced in the study area. This result suggests that rural women farmers in the study area obtain agricultural information mostly from informal or interpersonal sources which are face-to-face interaction and give instant feedback. The sourcing of agricultural information among women farmers in the study from interpersonal sources indicates high level of interactions in the study area. Accessibility to agricultural information through interpersonal interaction is more pronounced in the rural communities where access to television and internet services is low due to lack of time for pleasure, low income, technical know-how and illiteracy. This finding agrees with Anyanwu, Agwu and Umeweni (2002) who observed that women farmers receive farm information from non-professional interpersonal sources more often than from mediated and professional

interpersonal sources. This work is also supported by Ikoja – odongo (2002) who purported that rural women source information from fellow farmers or colleagues, relatives, friends, neighbours, the mass media and internet etc.

Table 1: Sources of Agricultural Information Available for Rural Women Farmers in Jos South LGA (n = 261)

Sources of Agricultural Information	Frequency*	Percentage
Informal (interpersonal sources)		
1. Husband	179	68.6
2. Family members	204	78.1
3. Neighbor	163	62.4
4. Friends	183	70.1
5. Other women farmers	200	76.6
6. Community leaders	152	58.2
7. Relatives	184	70.5
8. Personal experience	160	61.3
9. Educated individuals	182	69.7
10. Personal work	153	58.6
Printed media (Written sources)		
1. Posters	51	19.5
2. News Bulletin	15	5.8
3. Flyers	23	8.8
4. Newspaper	33	12.6
5. News Letters	27	10.3
Professional and Modern media		
1. Extension officers	88	33.7
1. Radio	95	36.4
2. Television	99	37.9
3. Internet	67	25.7
4. Mobile Phone	120	46.0
5. Computer	77	29.5
6. Video	41	15.7
7. Land Line	23	8.8

Source: Field Survey, 2018 *Multiple responses

Table 2: Information Needs of Rural Women Farmers

Information needs of rural women farmers as indicated by the respondents include preservation of harvested crops ($\bar{x}$ = 3.13), animal treatment ($\bar{x}$ = 3.04), new agricultural technologies ($\bar{x}$ = 3.02), planting time and techniques ($\bar{x}$ = 3.01), crop production ($\bar{x}$ = 2.99), weeding techniques($\bar{x}$ = 2.96), trend in food production ($\bar{x}$ = 2.94), farm input acquisition ($\bar{x}$ = 2.78), processing techniques ($\bar{x}$ = 2.73), storage practices and storage facilities ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), marketing and market price ($\bar{x}$ = 2.69). This confirmed Sokoya et al. (2014) who

reiterated that information need of rural farmers includes income generation, best farming practices, methods of fertilizer application, agricultural inputs, market prices, transportation, food processing and preservation and new agricultural technologies.

Table 2: Information Needs of Rural Women Farmers in Jos South LGA

Parameters	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Crop production	2.99*	0.914
Farm input acquisition	2.78*	0.893
Herbicide application	2.59*	0.979
Land clearing procedure	2.58*	0.924
How to apply Fertilizer in farms	2.51*	0.989
Planting time and techniques	3.01*	1.092
Weeding techniques	2.96*	0.868
Harvesting techniques	2.63*	0.911
Storage practices and storage facilities	2.72*	0.913
Trade laws	1.78	0.966
Processing techniques	2.73*	0.901
Marketing and market price	2.69*	1.703
Transportation system	2.42	0.766
Pest control	2.69*	0.915
Environmental protection techniques and practices	2.00	0.913
Animal treatment	3.04*	0.773
New agricultural technologies	3.02*	0.756
Trend in food production	2.94*	0.785
Health information	2.04	0.756
Preservation of harvested crops	3.13*	0.822
Decision-making processes	2.43	0.932
Portable drinking water	1.73*	1.187
Banking facilities	2.47	1.070
Waving	2.65*	0.917
Hair plaiting	2.59*	0.835
How to get treatment for ailment	2.53*	0.968
Religious information	2.32	0.868
Economic information	2.54*	0.864
Political information	1.89	0.966
Home management practices	1.97	0.901

Source: Field Survey, 2018 Cut-off Mean ($\bar{x}$ = 2.50)

Table 3: Information - seeking behavior of Rural Women Farmers

Entries in Table 3 showed that ahigh proportion (80.8%) of the respondents sought information from other women farmers (80.8) family members *70.1 %), friends (67.8%), community leaders (67.0%) and their relatives (62.8%). The result also revealed that half population of the respondents preferred seeking

information from their personal experience (55.9%), husbands (53.6%) and extension officers when in need of information (51.7%). This corresponds with Ikonja-Odongo, (2002); Anyanwu et al. (2002) that farmers seek information from personal experience, family members and neighbors' farmers, public extension service, agricultural facilities, farmers' union and associations, input dealers, mass media and the internet.

Table 3: Information-seeking Behaviour of Rural Women Farmers in Jos South LGA (n = 162)

Information - seeking Behavior	**Agreed**		**Disagreed**	
Rural women farmers sought information from	**Freq***	**%**	**Freq***	**%**
Husband	140	(53.6)	121	(46.3)
Family members	183	(70.1)	78	(29.9)
Neighbor	133	(50.9)	128	(49.0)
Friends	177	(67.8)	84	(32.2)
Other women farmers	211	(80.8)	50	(19.2)
Community leaders	175	(67.0)	86	(32.9)
Relatives	164	(62.8)	97	(37.2)
Personal experience	146	(55.9)	115	(44.1)
Educated individuals	124	(47.5)	137	(52.5)
Personal work	104	(30.8)	157	(60.1)
Extension officers daily	26	(10.0)	235	(90.0)
Extension officers only during farming season	97	(37.2)	164	(62.8)
Extension officers when I need the information	135	(51.7)	126	(48.3)
Printed media / Written sources	60	(23,0)	201	(77.0)
Radio	31	(11.9)	230	(88.1)
Television	47	(18.0)	214	(82.0)
Internet	74	(28.3)	187	(71.6)
Mobile phone	105	(40.2)	154	(59.8)
Computer	40	(15.3)	221	(84.6)

Source: Field Survey, 2018
*Multiple Responses

Conclusion

The study showed that respondents sourced agricultural information mostly from interpersonal (informal) sources which include family members, other women farmers, relatives, friends, educated individuals, husbands and neighbours. Information needs of the respondents were preservation of harvested crops, animal treatment, new agricultural technologies, planting time and techniques, crop production, weeding techniques, trend in food production, farm input acquisition, processing techniques, storage practices and storage facilities, marketing and market price among others. The study further revealed that respondents sought agricultural information from other women farmers, family members, friends, community leaders, relatives, personal experience, husbands and extension officers when in need of the information.

Recommendations

The study, therefore, recommends that Rural women farmers in the study area should be sensitized and enlightened on the importance of sourcing agricultural information from

written sources such as newspapers and bulletin, and professional and modern sources like radio/TV, the internet and mobile phone.

Rural women should be tutored on the importance of extension service delivery in agricultural development and hence be encouraged to seek information from extension officers on a perhaps daily basis or at all times and not when need be.

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