

Agricultural Information Needs of Rural Women: A Case Study of Iwo Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the agricultural information needs of women farmers in Iwo Local government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. Data was collected with a well-structured questionnaire, using multistage random sampling techniques, a sample size of 120 respondents were sampled. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentages, mean and person product moment correlation was used to analyze the data. The study revealed that majority (76.7%) of the respondents were between ages of 31-50 years. The result showed that most of agricultural information needs of women farmers relate to farm equipment, dry season vegetable farming, diseases management, amongst others. Major sources of information are radio followed by extension agents. There is significant relationship between the age ($r = 0.234$; $P = 0.05$) and years of farming experience ($r = 0.477$; $P = 0.05$) and agricultural information needs. The study concludes that women farmer seek and utilize agricultural information.

(*Keywords:* information needs, women, agriculture, farming, rural, extension information)

INTRODUCTION

Information has been identified as an important and crucial variable in the development process. This makes it imperative to provide adequate, relevant, and up-to-date information in order to transform agricultural production in many developing countries (Banmeke and Ajayi, 2008).

Information may be defined as organized data of ideas or skills that were served as raw resource for knowledge (Ochieng, 2003) and was missing link in the rural women's attainment of their self-determination as identified by researchers.

Information is needed because it affects individuals' living activities. According to Oladeji et al. (2011), information is one of the resources required for the improvement of agricultural production that must be required and use to make informed decisions. Considering the roles played by farmers, it is important to provide necessary information to them to boost their production.

The source of information are divided into two categories, one was conventional methods include personal contact methods and modern constituted the electronic methods (Cheema 2000). Also studies on information source used by most farmers especially in developing countries have described the following variety of sources used for seeking information; colleagues, friends, neighbors, relatives, and family (Kaniki 1994, Rezvanger and Mondope, 2000), professional and modern media (Shilaja and Jayaramuah, 1992), and personal network and business contracts (Barton and Beer, 1999). Unfortunately, rural areas usually lag behind urban areas in their access to information and developing countries are generally deprived more than developed countries in this regard. (Nosheen et al., 2010). Such lags jeopardize the ability of rural people to realize their full potential and improve their economic, social and environmental conditions (Alex et al., 2002).

According to World Bank Statistics, women perform two third of the entire world's work and produce than half of the food in most developing countries. Like any other developing nation in the world, majority of the people in Nigeria, about 70%, live in rural areas under poor socio-economic conditions (Nwosu 2005). Illiteracy, diseases, poor infrastructure and general under development often characterized these communities despite the abundant human and material resources in the rural area which have remained largely untapped over the years (Ajayi

2006). Looking at the information needs of rural women in Nigeria, Unomah (1998) posited that rural people need information on how to apply fertilizer in the farm, preservation of harvested crops and marketing of the farm produce. However female crop farmers' experienced greater problems in accessing agricultural information (Adomi et al., 2003).

However information is a crucial factor and its aid socio-economic development as it enables people to make informed choice towards improving their livelihood. Adebayo (2006) posited that agricultural information is no doubt central in enhancing agricultural productivity and facilitating poverty alleviation among rural farmers' effective use of various sources of information is essential for agricultural development and access to information on time will position individual to make right decisions that will better the well-being of individual. However against this background, it is pertinent to consider the information needs of women farmers in Iwo Local government area of Osun State, Nigeria. The study attempt to provide answers to the following questions:

- (i) What are the demographic characteristic of rural women
- (ii) What are the information needs of the respondents
- (iii) What are the sources and access to information

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Iwo Local Government Area of Osun State, Nigeria. The Local Government Area covers an area of 245 km² with an estimated population of 337,000 for 2013 National Bureau De Statistic (2006). It shares boundaries with Lagelu, Oyo, Aiyedire, and Ola-Oluwa Local Government Areas of Osun State.

Data was collected from respondents through the means of structured questionnaire and information was elicited on demographic characteristics of respondents. The study employed a multi-stage random sampling technique for the selection of respondents. A total of 120 rural women were selected form the Local Government Area.

Descriptive statistics such as frequency count, mean, percentages were used to summarize the data. Also inferential statistics such as Pearson's product moment correlation was used to test the relationship between the variables.

Agricultural information needs of respondents were measured using a 3 point rating type scale of not well informed (1), averagely informed (2), and well informed (3). The aggregate was computed as total score for agricultural information needs per respondent. The mean score of 2.0 implies well informed on the agricultural information needs.

Information sources were measured by considering frequency of contact with various sources. This was measured on four rating scale. Not all al (1), rarely (2), frequently (3), and very frequently (4).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of analysis in Table 1 shows that a majority (76.7%) of the respondents were between the ages of 31-50 years with the mean age of 38.5 years while only few 9.1% were above 50 years. This shows that women farmers were young and energetic in the study area and were within economically productive age. This age group may likely seek agricultural information to boost their production since they are still physically and mentally active in the day to day activities. About 85.0% of the respondents were married while only 15.0% were single. The married women farmers may be more committed to agricultural production activities to meet their familial responsibilities.

Thirty-two point five percent of the respondents had no formal education, while a majority (67.5%) had one form of education or the others ranging from primary, secondary, tertiary and adult education. This is an indication that a majority of the respondents had some level of formal education.

Results presented in Table 2 show that a majority (60.8%) of the respondents had less than two acres farm size. Only a few (12.5%) had more than four acres farm size. This may be due to the problem of land tenure associated with women farmers.

Table 1: Personal Characteristics of Respondents.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
21 – 30	17	14.2
31 – 40	54	45.0
41 – 50	38	31.7
50 – 60	8	6.6
Above 60	3	2.5
Marital Status		
Single	18	15.0
Married	102	85.0
Educational level		
No formal education	39	32.5
Primary education	25	20.8
Secondary education	21	17.5
Tertiary education	17	14.2
Adult education	18	15.0
Farm Size (in hectares)		
0.10 – 2.99 < 2	73	60.8
3.00 – 4.99 2 – 3	20	16.7
5.00 – 6.99 3 – 4	12	10.0
Above 4	15	12.5
Farming Experience (in years)		
1 – 10	44	36.7
11 – 20	65	54.2
21 – 30	9	7.5
31 – 40	2	1.7

Field Survey, 2013.

The results on farming experience measured in years shows that 54.2% of the respondents had 11-20 years of farming experience. This shows that most of the women farmers are well experienced which imply that they are not new in farming activities.

Table 2 also shows that respondents were well informed on fertilizer application, seed planting, and pesticide application, with weighted mean score (WMS) of 2.69, 2.56, and 2.07, while information on farm equipment and dry season vegetables ranked lower with WMS of 1.60 and 1.55.

Also disease management, technical knowledge, information on climate change, and information on irrigation methods were among those information required in the study area, others are available agricultural market days, market prices, produce supply, and grading. The findings are in line with Okwu and Umoru (2009), that majority of Nigerian farmers needed information on pesticides, fertilizer, and improved farm implements.

Information Sources to Women Farmers

The result in Table 3 shows that, the most important sources of information to women farmers is radio ($\bar{x} = 2.59$) followed by Extension Sgent $\bar{x} = 2.31$, and friends and neighbors ($\bar{x} = 2.21$). Video presentation, newspaper, telephone, posters as followed to be the least used channel of information:

$$\left(\bar{x} = 1.10\right) \left(\bar{x} = 0.93\right) \left(\bar{x} = 0.88\right) \text{ and } \left(\bar{x} = 0.87\right)$$

The result of the study is in line with Ozoma (2011) that majority of the farmers use radio as the most common information channel. It is very clear from the findings that major sources of information use by women farmers are mainly informal. This according to Mommoh (2002) that those sources to them are more reliable and authentic.

Constraints to Agricultural Information Needs

Table 4 shows constraints to agricultural information needs. Illiteracy, lack of adequate information, inability to access formal channels of information amongst others: the finding indicates that women farmers faced a lot of constraints in accessing agricultural information.

Hypothesis of the Study

Person's correlation analysis was used in testing the hypothesis. Result of the analysis shows significant relationship between age ($r = 0.234$; $P = 0.05$) and years of farming experience $r = 0.477$; $P = 0.05$).

This implies that for every unit increase in age of the farmers the more the respondents seek agricultural information; and the more experienced farmers are the more they seek agricultural information.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by their Agricultural Information Needs.

Agricultural information	No well informed	Averagely informed	Very well informed	WMS	Rank
Agricultural inputs					
Fertilizer application	3(2.5)	31(25.8)	86(71.7)	2.69	Informed
Seeds Planting	7(5.8)	39(32.5)	74(61.7)	2.56	Informed
Pesticides application	41(34.2)	30(25.0)	49(40.8)	2.07	Informed
Farm equipment	68(56.7)	32(26.7)	20(16.7)	1.60	Not informed
Dry season vegetable farming	22(18.3)	76(63.3)	22(18.3)	1.55	Not informed
Sowing	1(0.8)	36(30.0)	83(69.2)	2.68	Informed
Land preparation	-	51(42.5)	69(57.5)	2.58	Informed
Fertilizer application	1(0.8)	49(40.8)	70(58.3)	2.57	Informed
Soil fertility	15(12.5)	70(58.3)	35(29.2)	2.17	Informed
Diseases management	48(40.0)	50(41.7)	22(18.3)	1.78	Not informed
Technical knowledge	40(33.3)	72(60.0)	8(6.7)	1.73	Not informed
Climate change	47(39.2)	61(50.8)	11(9.2)	1.63	Not informed
Marketing					
Storage methods	13(10.8)	58(48.3)	49(40.8)	2.30	Not informed
Transportation	22(18.3)	92(76.7)	40(33.3)	2.15	informed
Product demand	14(11.7)	78(65.0)	14(11.7)	2.00	Informed
Available agricultural market days	22(18.3)	85(70.8)	20(16.7)	1.98	Not informed
Market prices	21(17.5)	94(78.8)	14(11.7)	1.94	Not informed
Produce supply	18(15.0)	74(61.7)	8(6.7)	1.92	Not informed
Grading	30(25.0)	58(48.3)	32(26.7)	1.88	Not informed
Source of fund processing	76(63.3)	36(30.0)	3(6.7)	0.43	Not informed
Cassava processing into pancake and flour	6(5.0)	48(40.0)	66(55.0)	2.50	Well informed
Processing of melon	2(1.7)	60(50.0)	58(48.3)	2.47	Well informed
Processing of fresh into paste	22(18.3)	76(63.3)	22(18.30)	2.00	Well informed

Field Survey, 2013 Figure in parenthesis or percentage

Table 3: Distribution by Sources of Information.

Sources of information	Not at all	Rarely	Frequency	Very frequently	WMS
Radio	2(1.7)	4(3.3)	35(29.2)	79(65.8)	2.59
Friends/Neighbors	1(0.8)	20(16.7)	40(33.3)	59(49.2)	2.31
Extension agents	3(2.5)	21(17.5)	43(35.8)	53(44)	2.21
Farmers association	2(1.7)	32(26.7)	62(51.7)	24(20.0)	1.90
Dealers association	2(1.7)	39(32.5)	60(50.0)	19(15.8)	1.80
Extension agent	3(2.5)	61(50.8)	36(30.0)	20(16.7)	1.61
Television	28(23.3)	44(36.6)	26(21.7)	22(18.3)	1.35
Posters	21(17.5)	72(60.0)	21(17.5)	6(5.0)	1.10
Video	27(22.5)	77(64.2)	14(11.7)	2(1.7)	0.93
Newspaper	56(46.7)	38(31.7)	10(8.3)	16(13.3)	0.88
Telephone	52(43.3)	39(32.5)	22(18.3)	7(5.8)	0.87

Field survey, 2013

Figure in parenthesis are percentage

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Constraints to Agricultural Information Needs.

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage
Illiteracy	77	64.2
Lack of adequate information	79	65.8
Inability to access formal channels of information	81	67.5
Poor delivery mechanism	91	75.8
Ineffective extension services and coverage	59	49.2

Field survey: 2013

*Multiple responses recorded

Table 5: Relationship between Respondent's Personal Characteristics and Agricultural Information Needs.

Variable	R value	P value
Age	0.234	0.026*
Marital status	0.072	0.438
Farm Size	0.059	0.416
Farming Experience	0.477	0.000*

Field survey:2013

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are made most of the women farmers and utilize information that will increase their productivity. Women farmers' needs for agricultural information are in the areas of disease management, technical knowledge, climate change, irrigation method, and sources of funding. However, lack of adequate information, illiteracy, poor delivery mechanisms, and ineffective extension services and coverage hindered agricultural information. The major source of information is radio and extension agent. In view of the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Agricultural extension agencies should take note of the information needs of women farmers particularly in areas.
2. Agricultural information to farmers should be gender specific and sensitive.
3. There is need for timely delivery of agricultural information.
4. There should be effective extension services and good coverage.

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