

INFORMATION AVAILABILITY AND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY OF RURAL FARMERS IN NIGER STATE

Abubakar Mohammed Bitagi*
and
Dr. Philip U. Akor Ph.D**

*Abubakar Mohammed Bitagi is currently a Principal Librarian, Federal University of Technology Library, Minna. He holds a Diploma in Library Science from University of Ibadan, a BLS from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and an MLS from Bayero University, Kano. Mr. Bitagi is currently a Ph.D Student in Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. E-mail: bitagi2006@yahoo.com. Phone No: 08036810242

**Dr. Philip U. Akor is currently a Lecturer I, Department of Library and Information Science, Federal University of Technology, Minna. He holds an NCE Economics/History, a B.A.(ED) History, an MLS, and a Ph.D Library and Information Science from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, E-mail: philakor@yahoo.com Phone No: 08036880881,

Abstract

This paper investigated the effect of lack of necessary information on agricultural productivity in Niger State. In carrying out this study six research questions were posed. The entire population which consisted of all the 300 chief farmers in Niger State were used because of the small size of the population. The instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire. Research questions were answered using frequency and percentages. The major findings of the study showed that rural farmers in Niger State obtained information about farming activities from within themselves. That the rural farmers also depend on radio houses for needed information about their farm work. That unavailability of agricultural extension workers, high level of illiteracy among the rural farmers, lack of libraries and information centre constitute the major problems militating against effective access and utilization of information resources. Based on the above findings, it was recommended that Niger State ministry of agriculture should introduce adult education programme for the rural farmers, employ agricultural extension workers and provide library and information centre as strategies to overcome the problem.

Key Words: Information, Agriculture, Productivity, Rural Farmers, Niger.

Introduction

Niger State, like several others in Nigeria is characterized by production of agricultural products such as root crops, cereals, fruits, fish and a host of others (Baba, 2010).

What distinguishes Niger State from other states of the federation is that given its position, it is not limited to the production of products either of the core Northern or Southern origin. For example, kolanut, palm

oil, cotton, groundnut which are exclusive reserve of either south-west, south-east, core North respectively were effectively cultivated with good returns in parts of Niger State during those days when agriculture was the mainstay of the national economy. Thus, Niger State's contribution to the development of the national economy, before the exploration and exploitation of petrol and allied products in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The availability of fuel and related products has however reduced greatly, the extent to which farming was practiced, not only in Niger State but also Nigeria as a whole. This assertion is corroborated by Falae (2004 p.44) when he argued that "while the discovery of petroleum in Nigeria has brought many benefits to the nation in the form of increased revenue and foreign exchange earnings, it is, also, true that the dominant place of the oil industry in the economy has been responsible, at least, in part, for the decline of agriculture over the past three decades".

Despite the negative contribution of oil discovery in Nigeria to agricultural production, these authors are of the view that the farmers who constitute majority of the population and live in rural areas lack the desired information to continue with their farming activities and how to practice it. What discovery, exploitation, sell and whole dependence on petroleum brought to farming was and or is to prevent it to nurture to the complex level whereby the information available to rural farmers and experience gathered in the process could not give room for the diversion of farmers' attention from farming. Donohue and Kochen, (1976p.7) in this direction reiterated that "the more complex our behaviour becomes, the greater are our needs for information. Life in contemporary urban society is very complex; so is our response to it. Merely, to satisfy basic needs, a person (or professional) must engage in complex behaviour. Participation in social life (and indeed professional

practices such as farming) increases its complexity. Information is essential if we are to navigate well in a complex world".

Attempts have been made by authors to define information. For example, Utor (1999, p.13) quoted Ajibero (1993) as having defined the term information as "data of value in planning, decision-making, and evaluation of any programme". He (Utor) went further to quote Kedem (1993) defining information as "knowledge communicated or received in relation to a particular subject". The two definitions above have attempted to highlight the major issues which information facilitates – planning, decision-making and evaluation of human activities such as farming. Thus, delving into the importance of information, Daniel (1999 p.55) opined that "information is power". According to him, "today, information is the most important singular variable which differentiates and determines whether a country is in the first, second, third or fourth world". Who knows, if our farmers have had the right information on agriculture and its practices Nigeria would have been among one of the top producers in agriculture in the 21st century.

Contrary to expectations, however, most local farms we visited in Niger State for a period of three years showed signs of information paucity on the part of the farmers as crops seemed to "complain" of lack of one attention or the other. This is a sign that most local farmers are ignorant of what to do when and how to do it. From Suleja to Jebba and Pandogari to Nupeko in the extreme ends of the state, the story is all the same – lack of adequate attention to the farm caused by the incapacitation of the farmers to identify and provide the basic needs of the crops. Most often a times therefore, farmers expect bumper harvest where bumper "food" was not supplied to the crops when it was most needed. The result is far below the expected harvest. This study is aimed at identifying the information needs of farmers' in Niger State and the best

ways of providing such services that could improve agricultural fortunes of the farmers.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective for which this study is carried out is to establish if information paucity has effect on dwindling agricultural fortunes of rural farmers in Niger State. Specifically, the study is to:

1. Identify the type of information-based-institutions from where rural farmers in Niger State obtain needed information.
2. Identify the type of information resources available to rural farmers in Niger State.
3. Determine whether the information resources provided by the libraries and information centre to rural farmers are adequate.
4. Identify if rural farmers in Niger State utilize available information resources for the benefit of their farming activities.
5. Ascertain the problems militating against effective access and utilization of information resources by rural farmers in Niger State.
6. Identify strategies that could be developed to overcome these problems.

Research Questions

This research will seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the types of information-based-institutions from where rural farmers in Niger State obtain needed information ?.
2. What type of information resources are available to rural farmers in Niger State ?.
3. Are the information resources provided by libraries and information

centre to rural farmers in Niger State adequate ?.

4. To what extent do rural farmers in Niger State utilize available information resources for the benefit of their farming activities ?.
5. What are the problems militating against effective access and utilization of information resources by rural farmers in Niger State ?.
6. What strategies could be developed to overcome these problems ?.

Research Method

Survey research method was used to carry out this study because of its large population. Aina (2002) asserted that survey research involves a systematic and comprehensive collection of opinion attitudes, feelings, beliefs and behaviors of a part or all of a population and described the feelings. For some studies, according to Nworgu (2006) the group of items to which the study relates (i.e. the population) may be too small enough to warrant the inclusion of all of them in the study. Based on this, no sampling of this population was carried out. The population for this study consisted all the 300 chief farmers in the 300 wards in Niger State of Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection in this study was questionnaire. The instrument before use was face – validated by presenting it to three senior colleagues in the field of library and information science. These experts were requested to examine the clarity of expression used as well as the appropriateness of language. The researchers administered and collected the questionnaire from the respondents. Thus there was 88% rate of returns of the questionnaire distributed. The data for the study was presented in table and analyzed using frequency and percentages.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	No. of questionnaires administered	No. of usable returns	Percentages
Farmers	300	265	88

Table 1 shows that a total of 300 questionnaires were administered and 265 representing 88% were returned, found usable and representative enough to embark. Meanwhile, 35(12%) were not returned on

the study for reasons best known to the respondents.

Table 2: Types of information-based-institutions from where rural farmers beliefs in Niger State obtain needed information

Information-based-institutions	Frequency	Percentage %
Library / information centres	10	4
Agricultural Dev. Projects (ADP)	20	8
Print media	40	15
Cyber café	0	0
Radio houses	200	75
Television houses	50	19
Agricultural Res. Institutes	25	9
Oral information	265	100

The table above shows that 100% of the rural farmers in Niger State obtain information about farming activities from within themselves (Oral information). This is followed by 75% of them who depend on radio houses for needed information about their farms. 19% and 15% of them also obtain information about their professional practices through television houses and print media institutions respectively. 9%, 8% and 4% of the rural farmers answered that they obtain agricultural information from

Agricultural Research Institutes, Agricultural Development Project and Library / Information Centres in that order. None of the farmers, 0% attest to the fact that agricultural information is obtained through the cyber café.

The scenario painted above is an indication that farmers in Niger State are still largely traditional in their methods of information acquisition pertaining to farming activities

Table 3: Information Resources Available to Rural Farmers in Niger State

Information Resources	Frequency	Percentage %
Books	20	8
Journals	5	2
Magazines	5	2
Research reports	0	0
Newspapers	0	0
Internet	0	0
Radio	0	0
Television	200	75
GSM	50	19
Film	120	45
	0	0

Table 3 above reveals that 75% of the rural farmers in Niger State have access and use radio to get information about farming activities. 45% also have and use GSM to communicate and be communicated with while a privileged few 19% have televisions from which they access information on agriculture. Furthermore, 8% and 2 sets of 2% who could be fairly literate have agreed

that books, journals and magazines are available for their use respectively. None of the rural farmers (0%) agreed that research reports, newspapers, internet and films are available for their use. The above findings shows that information resources available to rural farmers in Niger State are inadequate.

Table 4: Adequacy of Information Resources Provided by Libraries and Information Centre to Rural Farmers

Responses	Frequency	Percentages %
Yes	20	8
No	245	92
Total	265	100

Table 4 above reveals that majority of the rural farmers in Niger State (92%) have argued that information resources provided by libraries and information centres to supplement their efforts in farming activities is not adequate. On the other hand, a few, 8% of the farmers have argued in favour of the adequacy of information resources provided by libraries and information centre..

There is no doubting the fact that there is inadequate library and information services in the rural areas of Niger State. Eitagi (2009B, p.5) in an assessment of the

provision of public and school libraries in Niger State corroborated this finding when he observed that “apart from the state library headquarters, there is no functional branch library in any of the 25 LGAs in Niger State”. In fact most of those interviewed did not categorically recognize what a library or information centre is. The intention of government that branch libraries will be established in all local government areas of the state is thus defeated. Libraries and information centre. therefore, contribute minimally to the development of agriculture in Niger State.

Table 5: Extent of Utilization of Information Resources for the Benefit of Farming Activities

Source of Information	Extent of Utilization				Total
	VLE	LE	SE	VSE	
Books	5	10	30	230	265
Journals	5	8	35	217	265
Magazines	10	15	25	210	265
Research Reports	-	-	-	-	-
Newspapers	-	-	-	-	-
Internets	-	-	-	-	-
Radio	245	10	5	5	265
Television	15	30	5	215	265
GSM	30	225	5	5	265
Film	-	-	-	-	-
Oral information	265	-	-	-	265

Note: VLE = Very Large Extent; LE = Large Extent; SE = Small Extent; VSE = Very Small Extent

The table above shows that the radio, oral and GSM are more often than others utilized to a very large extent for information about agricultural activities. This is represented by 245 (92%), 265 (100%) and 225 (85%) respondents respectively. On the other hand, books, journals, magazines and television, represented by 230 (87%), 217 (82%), 210 (79%), 215 (81%) of the respondents respectively, are utilized only to

a very small extent. Apart from the GSM, the middling frequencies of utilization of resources are insignificant.

The implication of the above finding reemphasizes that majority of the rural farmers in Niger State are illiterates and therefore use old and traditional methods of farming.

Table 6: Problems Militating Against Effective Access and Utilization of Information Resources

Problems	Frequency	Percentage %
Illiteracy	255	96
Unavailability of agric. Extension workers	265	100
Traditional beliefs	200	75
Lack of libraries / information centres	265	100
Poverty among rural farmers	250	94
Lack of infrastructural facilities	180	68

The above table shows that the major factors militating against effective utilization of information resources by rural farmers in Niger State are the unavailability of Agricultural Extension Workers and Lack of Libraries and Information Centres in the rural areas as attested to by 100% of the respondents respectively. These are closely

followed by illiteracy and poverty among rural farmers with 96% and 94% in that order. Traditional beliefs and lack of infrastructural facilities represented by 75% and 68% of the respondents come last in the order of problems respectively.

Table 7: Strategies to Overcome the Problems

Strategies	Frequency	Percentages %
Adult education	250	94
Employment of Agric. Extension Workers	245	92
Change of beliefs	120	45
Provision of Lib. / Inf. Centres	180	68
Provision of infrastructural facilities	230	87
Provision of loan facilities	265	100
Enlightenment campaign	255	96

Table 7 above shows that 100% of the rural farmers need loan facilities not only to access desired information on agricultural production but also to enable them acquire necessary farm inputs, such fertilizers, agro-chemicals and practice mechanized farming etc. This is closely followed by 96%, 94% and 92% of the farmers who desire

enlightenment campaign, adult education and employment of agricultural extension workers respectively, to reduce the rate of ignorance on farming practices. Another set of 87%, 68% and 45% are of the view that there should be provision of infrastructural centre, provision and library and information centre and change of beliefs respectively to

pave way for acquisition of desired information about their agricultural practices.

Discussion of Result

The finding of the studies showed that rural farmers in Niger State obtained information about farming activities from within themselves. This findings is in line with the discovery of Uhegbu (2007) who posited that every human being, no matter his level of education, sophistication, affluence needs and selects information from the environment which he applies to the solution of a problem or satisfaction of a want, as the case may be. The result also revealed that the rural farmers depend on radio houses for needed information about their farm work. Supporting the findings Olalere (2000) stated that "nations will flourish or fail depending on the availability of professionals and citizens who have been educated to understand the power of information. The result further revealed that there is high level of illiteracy among the rural farmers. This finding is in line with findings of Bitagi (2009) who observed that the level of education attained in Niger State is at a very low ebb.

Conclusion

From the findings of this research, all indications point to the fact that rural farmers in Niger State suffer from information paucity. To remedy this situation, they need to be provided with information in all its ramifications if they are to be self reliant in food production and production of cash crops. In particular, they need information about modern methods of farming so as to maximize agricultural production from the farms.

References

- Aina, L. O. (2002). Research in information sciences. An African Perspective. Ibadan: Stirling – Hoden
- Aboyade, O. (1990). *The provision of information for rural development*. Ibadan: Fountain Publications August.
- Aliyu, B.M. (2008). Impact of library and information science education in national development; improving performance through training and retraining. *Middle belt journal of library and information science*. 8(2).
- Baba, K. M. (2010). Irrigation development and food security in Nigeria. Federal University of Technology, Minna: *Inaugural lecture series 15 presented on 1st July*.
- Bitagi, A.M. (2009A). Utilization of information resources and services by engineers in selected steel companies in Nigeria. *The Information Technologist: An International Journal of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)*. 6(2).
- Bitagi, A.M. (2009B). Repositioning public and school libraries for quality primary and post-primary education in Niger State in the 21st century. *Paper presented at the 1999 NLA Annual National Conference and AGM of Nigerian Library Association, Niger State Chapter held on 26th March, 2009 at ERC, Minna*.
- Daniel, J.O. (1999). The role of information services in a democratic culture. In A *Compendium of paper presentation at the 1999 NLA Annual National Conference and AGM held at Port-Harcourt between 8-14th May*.
- Donohue, J. C. and Kochen, M. (1976). Community information Centres: Concepts for analysis and planning. In M. Kochen and J.C. Donohue (eds). *Information for the Community*. Chicago: American Library Association.

- Falae, O. (2004). *The way forward for Nigeria: the economy and polity*. Flocel publishers.
- Harlin, (2008). The wonders of corn. *Awake* August.
- Madlion, S. (2011). The problem of agriculture in Nigeria. *Daily Trust*. Tuesday, February 22.
- Nworgu, B. G. (2006). Educational research: Basic issues and Methodology 2nd ed.). Nsukka. University Trust.
- Uhegbu, A.N. (2007). *The information user: issues and themes*. Okigwe: Whytem Publishers Nigeria.
- Utor, J.K. (1999). The role of information services in law libraries in a democratic culture. In *A Compendium of paper presentation at the 1999 NLA Annual National Conference and AGM held at Port-Harcourt between 8-14th May*.