

Full Length Research

Access and use of Agricultural Information Resources by Rural Women of Akure North and South Local Government areas of Ondo State Nigeria

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The study investigates how rural women farmers of Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State in Nigeria access and use agricultural information. Specifically, the study identifies the agricultural information needs of rural women; their information seeking behavior and the sources of the information used by the rural women. A questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data. One thousand (1000) questionnaires were administered but seven hundred and thirty (730) were retrieved. The findings also show a strong need for information of all types ranging from crop production which has the highest percentage (43.83%). Other information needs in order of magnitude include the following; pest control, (29.45%), preservation of farm produce, (29.45%) animal treatment (29.25%), health information (23.01%), religious information (22.87%), economic information (21.91%) and political information (2.32%). Based on these findings, it is recommended that all stake holders including the Federal and State governments as well as chairmen of the two local governments used in the study, should make concerted efforts to put the rural women farmers into their empowerment programs, especially regarding the provision of loan facilities to meet their socio-economic needs. The extension workers should also give the rural women equal privileges as it is given to their male counterparts.

Key Words: Information Resources, Agricultural Information, Rural Women, Information needs Akure North and South Local Governments

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Ondo State was created on 3rd, February 1976 from the then Western Region of Nigeria. It was bounded in the East by old the Bendel State now Edo State, and in the North by Kwara State, in the West by Oyo and Ogun States and in the South by the Atlantic Ocean. It originally included what is now called Ekiti State which was split off in 1996. Akure is the State Capital. The State comprises eighteen (18) local government areas including Akure North and South Local Government Areas (www.ngex.com/Nigeria/places/States/Ondo.htm). Residents in Akure North and South Local Government Areas are predominantly farmers on agriculture and agro products. Akure North Local Government has the surface area of 676.7 (50KM) with the population of 66,526 for males and 64,239 for females, giving a sum total of 130,765 persons. Akure South has the surface area of 318.0 (50KM) with the population of 178,672 males and 181,596 females, giving an aggregate of 360, 268 persons.

The role of women in agriculture cannot be over emphasized especially in the area of food security and agricultural growth. Most women who live in the rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Rural women farmers account for the greater part of the population of any developing country such as Nigeria. When the rural women farmers lack access to knowledge and information that would help them achieve maximum agricultural yield, they not only grope in the dark of ignorance but are driven to urban areas in search of formal employment as the only option for survival. Proper and timely information to rural women farmers will reduce uncertainty and enable them to identify alternative solutions to problems.

However, research has shown that women receive only about five percent of all agricultural extension resources (IFAP and women farmers, <http://www.fap.org/en/issues/historywomen>). FAO, (2010-11) in their report, also stated that women have lesser access than men to agricultural assets, information, training, extension services and to rural employment opportunities. Akure North and South Local Government rural women of Ondo State Nigeria as the case study for this paper are also affected by this. There have been short-comings of traditional print and library based methods of providing agricultural information to rural farmers who are generally illiterate and relatively remote from formal sources of information such as extension stations and libraries (Van and Fortier, 2000). Aina, (2007) also was of the opinion that farmers would benefit from global information if information centers are situated in rural areas and adequately equipped with all information and communication gadgets.

Lwoga, E.T et al(2011:2) citing Fawole (2008) revealed that there is a positive relationship between the increased flow of knowledge and information and agricultural development. However, most African countries have not devoted their efforts to the dissemination of knowledge and information, especially in rural areas where 70% to 80 % of the African population lives (Adomi et al, 2003). In spite of the large body of knowledge that exists in research institutions, universities, public offices and libraries, only a small amount of agricultural information is accessible to rural women farmers of Akure North and South Local Government Area of Ondo State. This situation is largely attributed to the weak linkages between research/ extension libraries and farmers and thus have prevented rural beneficiaries from accessing relevant information to improve their farming activities (Tire, 2006). It then becomes imperative to investigate the accessibility of agricultural information and knowledge by rural women farmers of Akure North and South Local Government areas of Ondo State in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives have been stated to guide this study:

- Identify the educational level of rural women in Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State.
- identify the agricultural information needs of rural women in Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State,
- find out the information seeking behavior of rural women in Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State,
- Identify sources of information accessed and used by rural women in Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Longman Dictionary of contemporary English (2003) defines information as facts or details that tell one about situations, person or event. Information makes one to take appropriate decisions on any problem facing him or her at any particular time (Achugbue, 2011). Information can be described as knowledge needed to answer some questions faced by people in their daily lives. Every person needs information for decision making. Such information ranges from common physiological needs to individual physiological needs. Stressing the importance

of information, Wulystan, (2012) described information as the cornerstone of successful socio-economic development because it plays a key role in decision making. Achugbue and Anie (2011) opined that information as an enterprise is important for the production process especially for agricultural production and marketing of agricultural produce. Mudukuti and Miller (2002) also affirmed that in the information age, dissemination of information and applying this information in the process of agricultural production will play a significant role in the development of farm settlements. For this reason, (Achugbue and Anie 2011) stressed the need for women farmers to be given training on latest technological skills to enable them improve on existing agricultural practices.

Around the world, there are at least 1.6 billion women who live in rural areas and they produce more than half of all the food that is grown in the world, specifically, up to 80 percent in Africa and 60 percent in Asia (IFAP & Women farmers). Up till now, they do not have access to adequate information resources and opportunities that they needed to make them more productive. USAID, (2012) stated that women farmers experience lack of access to resources globally in the form of information and training, production inputs, labor and credit. This has posed no small challenge to such women in their struggle to improve their economic status where farming is concerned.

Quick and prompt access to information by rural women can greatly improve and increase their productivity. Lwoga, E.T et al, (2011) opined that an improved information and knowledge flow to, from and within the agricultural sector is a key component in improving small-scale agricultural production and linking increased production to remunerative markets, thus leading to increase in food yield and security and improved rural livelihoods and national economics.

The information needs of women should be of great concern to any society because women are the foundation of most communities. (Olorunda, 2004) . Stressing the importance of information to women irrespective of their location, Armad and Shariful (2011) were also of the view that women, irrespective of their location, need information regarding agriculture, animal husbandry and otherwise for their involvement in socio economic growth.

Lwoga et al (2011) observed that there are still gaps in access to information and knowledge among the rural people which need to be strengthened. USAID (2012) in its briefing paper discussed these issues of access to information by campaigning against gender disparities in getting access to information, and other relevant information resources.

Studies on information sources used by most farmers, especially in the developing countries have described the following variety of sources used for seeking information:

- Colleagues, friends, neighbors, relatives and family (Kaniki, 1994, Rezvanfar and Mandape, 2000)
- Professionals and modern media, (Shilaja and Jayaramuah 1992)
- Personal work and business contracts. (Barton and Bear, 1999)

Knowledge about information needs of the female farmers is crucial for effectively meeting their needs. Therefore, understanding the type of information sources preferred by female farmers could be used for their farming techniques and standard of living. Munyua (2000) observed that lack of reliable and comprehensive information for rural women farmers in Delta State was a major hindrance to agricultural development. They required information on agricultural inputs, market price, transportation systems, environmental sound production techniques and practices, new agricultural technologies, food processing and preservation decision-making processes, trade laws and trends in food production. Paquet (1996) asserted that rural people need information on how to apply fertilizer in farms, preservation of harvested crops, banking facilities, weaving, hair plaiting, portable drinking water and how to get treatment for ailments. But most available local information is packaged in a raw form and therefore difficult to access or use.

The importance of information and communications Technology (ICTs) for rural women farmers cannot be overemphasized. Achugbue and Anie (2011), Rathgeber (2000), and Otolo (2007) stressed that mobile technology in this information age has helped to break down the isolation of individuals living in remote rural areas.

Radio and television also play a major role in delivering agricultural messages in Africa. Morgan, (1993) in a study carried out in Kenya found out that 80% of the population that owned a radio was males. However, the female percentage of listeners to radio information was higher than the males. Munya (2000) further stressed that television; audio visual resources, print technologies etc would help female farmers in this information age.

Achugbue and Anie (2011) also identified e-mail, news groups, transfer protocol, telecenters, CD-ROMs, internet, electronic conferencing and networking as sources of information that would help rural women farmers to enhance agricultural development and their standard of living.

SAMPLING METHOD

The study was conducted in Akure North and South Local Government Areas of Ondo State in Nigeria. Six towns in each of the two local governments of Akure North and South were randomly selected for this study. The

Table 1: Educational Level of Rural Women Farmers

S/N	Education Attainment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	No formal education	420	57.34
1.	Primary school only	215	29.45
2.	Secondary school	95	13.01
3			
	Total	730	100

Table 2: Information Needs of Rural Women Farmers

S/N	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Crop Production	324	43.83
2.	Pest control	215	29.45
3.	Preservation of farm produce	215	29.45
4.	Animal treatment	215	29.25
5.	Health information	168	23.01
6.	Religious information	167	22.87
7.	Economic information	160	21.91
8.	Political information	17	2.32

selected towns are Iju Itaogbolu, Ita Ogbolu, Oba Ile, Osi, Igoba, Isininigbo, Akure Municipal, Oda, Aule, Adofure, Fowose, and Aye . Sixty two female farmers were sampled from each selected town and that made the total population of the female farmers sampled in the entire towns of the two local governments to be 730

INSTRUMENT

A questionnaire was used as the instrument for collecting data in the study. Section A of the questionnaire contained the core questions that were raised for the study. The questionnaire was structured on a four point Likert type of rating scale of Strongly Agree (4points), Agree (3points), Disagree (2points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics, involving percentage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tables 1 reveals that majority of the respondents (57.34%) are without any form of formal education, suggesting a very low literacy level among the women farmers in both local governments. 215 (29.45%) respondents had access to primary education only while

95 (13.01%) of the respondents were privileged to have both primary and secondary education.

As evident from Table 2, the need for information on crop production is high as previously indicated. 324 (43.83%). 215 (29.45%) respondents were of the opinion that their information needs are in the areas of preservation of farm produce, pest control and animal treatment. Other topics on which rural women farmers in Akure North and South Local Governments of Ondo State needed information were on Animal treatment 215(21.25%), Health 168(23.01), Religious information 167(22.87%), Economic information such as market prices and other related issues 160(21.25) and Political information 17(2.32%). However, it can be concluded that the rural women farmers were very interested in knowing more about crop production. This is because crop production is their major source of income.

Table 3 shows that 180 (24.64%) of the respondents seek information from extension workers while a reasonable number 550(75.32%) of the respondents disagree that they seek information from extension workers It also shows that 550(75.32%) of the respondents prefer to get information from community leaders while 180(24.64) prefer otherwise. The Table 3 also revealed that a large number of the respondents 647(88.6%) obtain information through media such as radio, TV, newspapers and posters. While 83(11.36%) of them do not obtain information through the media. Others seek information on preservation, economic health, crop production and information on how to treat animals 550 (75.32%). 180 (24.64%) of the respondents do not make effort to get information on preservation, economic,

Table 3: Information Seeking Behavior of Rural Women Farmers

S/N	Information seeking Behavior.	Agree	%	Disagree	%
1	I seek agricultural Information from extension workers on a daily basis	180	24.64	550	75.32
2	I get agricultural information from community leaders	550	75.32	180	24.64
3	I obtain agricultural information through media (radio, TV, newspapers, and posters)	647	88.6	83	11.36
4	I need information on preservation, economic, health, crop production and information on how to treat animals	550	75.32	180	24.64
5	I collect agricultural information from extension officer only during farming season	99	13.28	83	11.36

Table 4: Sources of Information Accessed and Used by Rural Women Farmers

S/N	Source of Information	Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Community Leaders	212	29.04
2.	Husband ,neighbor and friends	202	27.67
3.	Personal experience	100	13.69
4.	Radios and Television	56	7.67
5.	Educated Individuals	54	7.39
6.	Internet	53	7.26
7.	Written sources	51	6.98
8.	Extension Officers	2	0.02
	Total	730	100

health. crop production and information on how to treat animals. 99(13.28%) respondents also agreed to collecting information from extension officers only during farming season, but 83 (11.38%) respondents do not bother to get information from extension workers during farming seasons.

Table 4 revealed that 29.04% of the respondents rely mainly on their community leaders for information. A good number of the respondents 202(27.67%) rely on husbands, neighbors and friends for information. 100(13.69%) rely on their personal experience. Others 56 (7.67%) depend on radio and Television. The table also reveals that about 7.39 %(54) of the rural women farmers are educated. 53(7.26%) of them rely on internet. 51(6.98%) rural women farmers seek information in printed formats and 2 (0.02%) rely on information they get from extension officers.

FINDINGS

i. The survey confirms that there is a strong need for information of all types ranging from crop production, pest control, and treatment of

animals, economic information, health, and preservation of farm produce, political and religious information.
 ii. (43.83%) of the respondents needed more information on crop production.
 iii. Pest control and preservation of farm produce has (29.45%) each.
 iv. Treatment of animals (29.25%), health information (23.0%), religious information (22.87%), economic information (21.91%), and political information with the lowest (2.32%)
 v. Respondents pattern of seeking information differs as (86.6%) prefer to get information from media (TV/radio, newspaper), (75.32%) prefer to get information from community leader, (75.32%), needs information on preservation, economic health, crop production, and information on how to treat animals.
 vi. On the other hand, respondents' information seeking behavior pattern from extension workers is not encouraging (24.64%). 13.28% of respondents collect information from extension workers only during farming season.

CONCLUSION

Women make essential contributions to the rural economy of all developing countries yet they have lesser access than men to agricultural assets, services and to rural employment opportunities.

The survey confirms that even though the respondents have strong need for information of all types ranging from crop production; pest control; preservation; treatment of animals; health information and others, they have less access to this information.

Governments at the Federal, State and Local Government levels should make concerted effort to address the information needs of the rural women farmers. This will help agriculturist, particularly women farmers increase their crop yield and consequently beef up food security and economic sustainability in Ondo State and beyond.

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