

# **Accessibility and Utilization of Agricultural Information Sources in NRCRI Library by Rural Farmers in Olokoro, Umuahia South, Abia State**

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This study examined community librarianship, accessibility and utilization of agricultural information resources in National Root Crops Research Institute, Umudike library, by rural farmers in Olokoro. The study was guided by four specific objectives. The study employed descriptive survey research design, while the population of the study is one thousand and fifty (1050) rural farmers in Olokoro. Sample of the study is 105. The sampling technique employed is the proportionate stratified sampling technique. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean was the method of data analysis. Findings of the study reviewed that: rural farmers in Olokoro accessed agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library at a very high extent and they utilized agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library at a very extent. The study found that finance, low literacy skill, non-currency of agricultural information resources, low information literacy and attitude of librarians are the challenges of using agricultural information resources in NRCRI library. Currency of agricultural information resources, availability of fund and information literacy training for farmers are solutions to the challenges of using agricultural information resources in the library. The study recommended that: current agricultural information materials should be provided by the library, librarians in the library should always conduct current awareness services to enable rural farmers to be aware of the arrival of current agricultural information resources and that Literacy education training on agricultural information resources be conducted for the rural farmers at regular intervals.

**Keywords:** Accessibility, Utilization, Agricultural Information, Rural Farmers and Agricultural Information Resources

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Information is a source or a facilitator of change or transformation (Wilson & Gapsiso, 2014). Dutta (2009) observes that to achieve an educated, healthy and safe global population, access to information is crucial. The understanding of the information needs of rural dwellers which are activity based as observed by Anunobi, Ogbonna and Osochukwu (2014) will help the rural dwellers to attain their health, political as well as other socio-economic needs. Aina (2011) noted that since rural communities are farming communities, information on how to improve their farming and farming techniques should be provided for them in a format that they will understand.

## Accessibility

Access to information to rural dwellers in Nigeria is a right and not a privilege. It is therefore, critical in the people's understanding of their entitlement to welfare benefits and sources to overcome social exclusion (Harande, 2009). Accessibility of information is an important recurring theme in the literature. Accessibility according to Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), is a term generally used to describe the degree to which resources, services, environment or product, is obtained by people. They further stated that it can be viewed as the ability to obtain information with little or no stress. These authors maintain that resources may be available in the library and even identified bibliographically, yet the user may not be able to lay hands on them. They further revealed that efforts are being made worldwide to promote access to information in all formats.

## Utilization

Utilization has been defined by Uhegbu (2007) as the putting into use of acquired information. He further states that utilization of information differs from person to person and from one corporate organization to the other according to their information needs and other socio economic requirements. This is to say that information resources can also be required for agricultural purposes. The type of information needed by the rural farmers in rural areas will include agricultural information that can boost their agricultural production.

The ultimate purpose of utilization of information according to Nkamnebe (2014) is to satisfy the seeker's varied needs.

## Agricultural Information

Agriculture is the sources of food for man. Agricultural information refers to facts or details about agriculture (Okoche, 2014). Okoche further stated that agriculture has been affected negatively by information explosion and information overload. According to him, low literacy level, low information literacy skills, absence of library and information services and zero-time-zone condition make it very difficult for rural farmers to obtain current information on modern agricultural practices. This results to poor agricultural productivity and also creates the need for information workers/librarians to evolve ways of making quality agricultural information available to rural farmers in order to enhance food security.

## Rural Farmers

In the words of Nicholas, (2017), rural farmers refer to farmers living in the rural arrears. Most of them have low level of education, their major occupation is subsistence farming and they are generally characterized by poverty, poor health condition and ignorance.

Rural farmers account for the larger part of the population of any developing country such as Nigeria. Governments of developing countries have a major responsibility of ensuring that there is adequate rural development in their various communities and local governments which would lead to effective and efficient agricultural systems that will not only supply food and animal protein but also foster the utilization of natural resources in a sustainable manner (CGIAR, 1995).

When the rural farmers lack access to knowledge and information that would help them achieve maximum agricultural yield, they are not only grope in the dark but are driven to the urban centres in search of formal employment, as the only option for survival (Munyua, 2000). Blait (1996) pointed out that the least expensive input for improved rural agricultural development is adequate access to knowledge and information in areas of new agricultural technologies, early warning systems(drought, pests, diseases etc), improved seedlings, fertilizer, credit, market prices etc. There have been shortcomings of traditional print and library based methods (Van and Fortier, 2000) of providing such agricultural information to rural farmers who are generally illiterate and relatively remote from formal sources of information (e.g. extension stations, libraries). Aina (2007) also, was of the opinion that farmers would benefit from global information, if information centres, are cited in rural areas complete with all information and communication gadgets.

## **Agricultural Information Sources**

Sources of information are tools that can possibly meet the information needs of different categories of users. They are the information carriers. There are different sources of information but what matters are 'what' sources are available and relevant to the different categories of users and what sources of information are useful for their different seeking behaviour, and mainly for utilization in order to accomplish tasks/needs.

Information sources are various means by which information is recorded for use by an individual and organization. Sources of information are: radio, television, extension workers, cooperative societies, friends and colleagues, newspapers and magazines, books/leaflets, phones, libraries and institutes. Also, observation of people organizations, speeches, documents, picture and art work can also be described as information sources (Adio, Emmanuel Olorummishola (2016).

Agricultural information sources therefore are information sources that provide agricultural information that aid farmers in their agricultural practices.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of information services is to improve the standard of living of rural dwellers through provision of information resources towards the actualization of basic education, food security etc. Libraries have the potentials of getting vast amount of information to rural dwellers especially farmers in a timely, comprehensive and cost effective manner, thereby improving their standard of living. Researchers have identified personal, social and economic benefits which rural dwellers derive from the use of information services such as enhanced communication, improved interaction and access to timely information and information exchange among others (Haruna, et al., 2009).

However, it is speculated by some authors that rural farmers may be lacking accessibility and utilization of agricultural information resources in information facilities, while on the other hand, other authors are of the opinion that a number of rural farmers are not only accessing agricultural information resources but also utilizing them (Osochukwu, P. N.& Kamaludden, I.E)

The impression is that many rural farmers may be denied utilization of agricultural resources available in the libraries in their areas. This situation may lead one to begin to ask whether or not there is coverage and quality of agricultural information circulating within the rural communities through libraries in Abia State, as well as what the future holds for the rural farmers in terms of provision of food to fight hunger, putting into consideration the global trend about agricultural information utilization in a period of economic recession.

Yet, there is no available study on accessibility and utilization of agricultural information resources by farmers in Umudike, Abia State. This is the problem that necessitated this study.

## **Objective of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to examine accessibility and utilization of agricultural information resources in NRCRI library by rural farmers in Umudike.

1. To ascertain the extent of accessibility of agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library by rural farmers in Umudike;
2. To determine the extent of utilization of agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library by rural farmers in Umudike;
3. To identify the challenges of using agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library by rural farmers in Umudike; and
4. To identify solutions to the challenges of using agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library by rural farmers in Umudike.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The population of the study is 1050 rural farmers in Umudike, Ikwuano, Abia State. The sample of the study is 105. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to select 105 from the total farmers' population of 1, 050 representing 10% of the total population. The instrument used for data collection is questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using mean and percentage count. A total of forty five (45) questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and forty five (40) or 88.89% were correctly filled and returned. 2.50 was used as criterion mean.

## RESULTS

**Table 1.**Occupational Distribution of Respondents

| S/N | Occupation       | No of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 1   | Yam Farmers      | 11                | 27.5       |
| 2   | Cassava Famers   | 20                | 50         |
| 3   | Cocoa Yam Famers | 3                 | 7.5        |
| 5   | Potato Famers    | 2                 | 5          |
| 6   | Ginger Famers    | 4                 | 10         |
|     | Total            | 40                | 100        |

Key: SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, Accepted = Accepted and Rejected = Rejected.

**Table 2.**Mean Responses of Farmers on the Extent of Accessibility of Agricultural Information Resources

| S/N | Item Statement                  | SA | A | D  | SD | $\bar{x}$ | RMK |
|-----|---------------------------------|----|---|----|----|-----------|-----|
| 1   | AGORA                           | 3  | 2 | 5  | 30 | 3.5       | HE  |
| 2   | Annual Report                   | 25 | 5 | 7  | 3  | 1.7       | VLE |
| 3   | Agricultural Proceedings        | 4  | 6 | 8  | 22 | 3.2       | HE  |
| 4   | Agricultural Journals           | 5  | 5 | 6  | 24 | 2.23      | LE  |
| 5   | Agricultural Bulletins          | 4  | 6 | 10 | 20 | 3.4       | HE  |
| 6   | Abstracts on Agricultural works | 4  | 5 | 2  | 29 | 3.4       | HE  |
| 7   | Books on Agriculture            | 2  | 3 | 5  | 30 | 3.58      | VHE |
|     | Cluster Mean                    |    |   |    |    | 3.0       |     |

The data presented in table 2 above shows that the cluster of the responses of rural farmers in Olokoro is 3.0 which is greater than the criterion mean of 2.5 on 4 point rating scale. This indicated a high extent of accessibility of agricultural information resources in NRCRI Library, Umudike.

**Table 3.** Mean Responses of Farmers on the Extent of Utilization of Agricultural Information Sources

| S/N | Item Statement | SA | A | D  | SD | $\bar{x}$ | RMK |
|-----|----------------|----|---|----|----|-----------|-----|
| 1   | Newspapers     | 24 | 6 | 6  | 4  | 1.75      | VLE |
| 2   | Annual Report  | 29 | 3 | 3  | 6  | 1.50      | VLE |
| 3   | Proceedings    | 2  | 3 | 15 | 20 | 3.33      | VHE |

**Table 3. Continuation**

|   |                        |    |   |    |    |      |     |
|---|------------------------|----|---|----|----|------|-----|
| 4 | Agricultural Journals  | 6  | 4 | 12 | 18 | 3.04 | VHE |
| 5 | Agricultural Bulletins | 4  | 6 | 17 | 13 | 2.98 | HE  |
| 6 | Abstracts              | 25 | 5 | 4  | 6  | 1.78 | VLE |
| 7 | Magazines              | 28 | 2 | 7  | 3  | 1.63 | VLE |
|   | Cluster Mean           |    |   |    |    | 2.29 |     |

The data presented in table 3 above shows that the cluster of the responses of rural farmers in Olokoro is 2.29 which is lesser than the criterion mean of 2.5. This indicated a low extent of utilization of agricultural information resources in NRCRI, Library, Umudike.

**Table 4. Mean Responses of Farmers on the Challenges of using Information Sources By Rural Famers**

| S/N | Item Statement                                       | SA | A | D  | SD | $\bar{x}$ | RMK      |
|-----|--|----|---|----|----|-----------|----------|
| 1   | Financial challenge                                  | 35 | 2 | 1  | 2  | 1.25      | Rejected |
| 2   | low literacy level,                                  | 33 | 3 | 2  | 2  | 1.33      | Rejected |
| 3   | low information literacy skills                      | 32 | 4 | 2  | 2  | 1.35      | Rejected |
| 4   | Non currency of information resources in the library | 30 | 5 | 3  | 2  | 1.43      | Rejected |
| 5   | Attitude of the library staff                        | 2  | 1 | 10 | 27 | 3.3       | Accepted |
|     | Cluster Mean   |    |   |    |    | 2.08      |          |

The data presented in table 4 above shows that the cluster of the responses of rural farmers in Olokoro is 2.08 which is lesser than the criterion mean of 2.5. This also indicates that rural farmers in Umudikedid not agree that they face some challenges while using agricultural information resources in the library.

**Table 5. Mean Responses of Farmers on the Solutions to the Challenges of Using Agricultural Information by Rural Famers**

| S/N | Item Statement  | SA | A | D  | SD | $\bar{x}$ | RMK      |
|-----|---|----|---|----|----|-----------|----------|
| 1   | Currency of agricultural information materials  | 35 | 2 | 1  | 2  | 1.25      | Rejected |
| 2   | Librarians should be courteous in the discharge of information retrieval services   | 18 | 2 | 12 | 8  | 2.75      | Accepted |
| 3   | Fund should be made available to the library to acquire relevant agricultural information resources                         | 32 | 2 | 2  | 4  | 1.2       | Rejected |
| 4   | The library should embark on current awareness services, informing farmers on the arrival of current agricultural materials | 30 | 3 | 5  | 2  | 1.48      | Rejected |
| 5   | Training should be organized for farmers on information literacy  | 28 | 2 | 4  | 6  | 1.5       | Rejected |
|     | Cluster Mean  |    |   |    |    | 11.08     |          |

The data presented in table 5 above reveals that the cluster of the responses of rural farmers in Olokoro is 1.64 which is lesser than the criterion mean of 2.5. This indicated that the rural farmers in Olokorodid not agree that the five items can help to address some of the challenges of using agricultural information resources in NRCRI library, Umudike.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results and findings obtained in this study, the following major conclusions were drawn:

The rural farmers in Olokoro access agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library to a very high extent. Rural farmers in Umudike utilize agricultural information resources in NRCRI, library to a very high extent. Attitude of the library staff is the greatest challenge faced by rural farmers in Olokoro in the use of agricultural information resources. That librarians should be courteous in the discharge of information retrieval services is the best solution to address challenges of using agricultural information resources by rural farmers in Olokoro.

## RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends as follows:

- (1) That current agricultural information materials should be provided by the library.
- (2) Librarian in the library should always conduct current awareness services to enable rural farmers to be aware of the arrival of current agricultural information resources.
- (3) Literacy education training on agricultural information resources should be conducted for rural farmers at regular intervals.

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