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INFORMATION NEEDS, INFORMATION SOURCES AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORKERS IN OSOGBO ZONE OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated information needs, information sources, and information seeking behaviour of agricultural extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State, Nigeria. It also focused on the factors influencing the choice of information sources and problems encountered when sourcing for information. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 54 respondents in the study area out of which 50 (98.6%) responded and were used for the analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data using percentage and tables. Findings showed that personal collections, colleagues, radio and television programmes were the most used sources of information by extension workers in the study area. Furthermore, the ability of information sources to meet the information needs and reliability of the information sources were the major factor influencing the choice of information sources. The study discovered that non-availability of relevant information and inadequate current information sources were seen as main problems confronting the extension workers. Thus, accessibility of agricultural database, the establishment of agricultural information centres, making information sources attractive, and that extension workers should liaise with agricultural research centres for acquiring more knowledge were the suggestions made for improving the information needs, sources and seeking behaviour of extension workers in the course of this study.

Key Words: Information Needs, Information Sources, Information Seeking Behaviours, Relevant Information, Agriculture and Extension Workers.

INTRODUCTION

Improvement of agricultural production necessitates some form of appropriate information. People depend on information in social, cultural, political, scientific and technological fields (Bigdele, 2007). Information is a catalyst for solving a problem and a very important tool for economic development (Ogunmodede and Akangbe, 2013, Sobalaje and Ogunmodede, 2015). In Nigeria, the extension service system is the most important public information service with the widest range of responsibilities for agricultural and rural development. An agricultural extension worker serves as conduit pipe between researchers and farmers through the transmission of information on the improved technique of farming that will enable them to increase their productivity in order to meet the increasing food demands of the teeming population. The attainment and sustenance of high level of agricultural production and income are not possible without an effective and efficient agricultural extension workers'

input and appropriate tools that are relevant to farmers' needs (Anil, 2008). Agricultural extension workers do not merely to be in a gap between researchers and farmers only but to provide information to the farmers. The efforts of extension workers are meant to ensure that information on agricultural communication technologies are made available to improve the productivity of farmers and to facilitate the role an extension worker plays in national development.

Some farmers' information needs such as sources of credit facilities, issues on land-ownership and marketing of agricultural produce are quite different from those of extension agents which include control of major pests and diseases, proper handling of insecticides and best cropping methods. Only by understanding how extension workers obtain and use information can one see how the extension worker fits into the process of information transfer.

Information needs can be diverse in nature but many times linked with individual's work activities; therefore agricultural information needs of extension workers is closely connected with the rural development and farming activities. This cut across information on production, post-planting, marketing and sales as well as policy-oriented information for the eradication of poverty. Notwithstanding, it is insufficient to limit extension workers' effort to just understanding farmers' information needs; researchers need to explore extension workers searching behaviour as this will further enhance the development of better intervention programmes. In Nigeria Ozowa (1995) noted that farmers seldom feel the impact of agricultural innovations either due to lack of access or poor dissemination of such vital information. This has become a key constraint to agricultural development in the country.

The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to find out the information needs, information sources and information seeking behaviour of Agricultural extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State, Nigeria, while the specific objectives of this paper are to:

1. find demographic factors of extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State.
2. examine the information needs of extension workers in the study area.
3. examine the sources of information that extension workers' used in the study area.
4. examine the relevancy of information obtains to their needs.
5. Find out the problems militating against the information seeking behaviours of the extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State.

Research Questions

The objectives of this paper stated above translate to these research questions:

1. What are the demographic factors of extension workers?
2. What are the information needs of extension workers in the area?
3. What are the sources of information that extension workers used in the study area?
4. To what extent is the information obtained relevant?
5. What are the problems militating against information seeking behaviours of the extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State?

LETTERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Agricultural Extension and Agricultural Extension Workers

The term agricultural extension has changed over times (Swanson, 2008). It is no more only by the Training and Visit (T&V) but it has been moved towards broader concepts which include community development, poverty eradication, education and development of technical skills in every aspect of farming activities. According to Bello and Salau (2009), agricultural extension referred to an education system that provides farmers with technical advice required to increase farm output, giving advice on credit facilities and marketing strategies. Khalil (2008) defined agricultural extension workers as the personnel who are responsible for meeting the goals of the extension system. The extension system is a system whereby research is performed by researchers and the results are turned over to extension workers for proper dissemination to prospective farmers. Extension personnel mostly deals with information dissemination, they are expected to be information seekers to keep themselves updated in every aspect of on-farm and off-farm activities (Kumaran, Vimala, Raja and Alagappan, 2012). Agricultural extension workers are the key facilitators of the farming community to access quality farm inputs, farm machinery, technical counselling, institutional credit, better price and to mobilise them for a collective compliance of farm practices to achieve sustainability. Yomi-Alfred and Odefadehan (2007) noted that extension workers cannot be efficient in their responsibilities to their clientele if they are deficient in information dissemination resulting from not being adequately informed on some subjects.

Agriculture Extension Workers and Information Needs

Vickery and Vickery (1992) provide a general view of information needs, observing that the individual will want different types of general information to satisfy intellectual curiosity, and this might be information on current affairs, social and political events, legal matters, and financial matters. Like all other professionals, extension workers need the information to meet their decision making challenges. Information need is different from information want. Yomi-Alfred and Odefadehan(2007) classified information needs of agricultural extension workers in Southwest of Nigeria into technical, commercial, social, legal and general information. The agriculture sector in developing countries is increasingly becoming knowledge intensive that it needs accurate and reliable information on farming activities. Information must be relevant and meaningful to farmers, in addition to being packaged and delivered in a way preferred by them (Diekmann et al, 2009). Aina (1989) discovered from his research work that agricultural extension workers expressed a variety of agricultural information needs, while most of these needs are technical, which could only be fulfilled by research scientists. Information need is mostly linked by individual's work activities, therefore agricultural extension workers' information need revolves around farming activities. Extension workers cannot be efficient in their responsibilities to their clientele if they are deficient in information dissemination resulting from not being adequately informed on some subjects (Yomi-Alfred and Odefadehan,2007).

Agriculture Extension Workers and Information Sources

Asiabaka and Michelle (2002) posit that an extension worker who utilizes several methodologies of information sources and dissemination (eg. radio messages, information dissemination at markets, banners, posters, bulletin boards) will be more effective than relying solely on one-to-one visits. Results from the study showed that the farmers ranked fellow farmers' and friends as the most available source of information; this was closely followed by extension agents and farmer's cooperatives. On the contrary, the study conducted by Sobalaje (2011) on the Training and Visit (T and V) system of agricultural extension in Osun State found that they relied mostly on personal contact with minimal radio and television programmes.

Agriculture Extension Workers and Information Seeking Behaviour

Information seeking behaviour is a wide term that comprised how people seek information, the sources and the use to reduce uncertainty. In the course of information seeking, Wilson (2000) reported that the individual interacts with people, manual information systems, or with computer-oriented information systems. It is very clear from the sources and channels of information used by the agriculture extension workers that their information seeking behaviour is mainly formal but the dissemination of the information to the farmers is informal. Suresh, et al (2011) opined that farmers exhibit different levels of involvement in information search and use. A better understanding of farmers' agricultural information needs and information search behaviours could help guide extension and other agricultural programmes to better target specific groups of farmers. For extensions workers and other information professionals to be effective, they need a fuller knowledge of the information seeking behaviour, needs, and uses of individuals (Pezeshki-Rad and Zamani, 2005). However, the main reason for seeking information by extension workers is to find a solution to the problems of their clients, mostly the farmers.

METHDOLOGY

The study adopted a survey descriptive research design. Fifty-four (54) agricultural extension workers scattered throughout Osogbo zone in Osun State, Nigeria was considered as the population of the study. Total enumerative sampling technique was used to cover all the 54 agricultural extension officers working in the nine (9) local government area that constituted the Osogbo zone of Osun State. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire which was administered to the agricultural extension workers on their meeting day. Fifty (50) questionnaire were returned and found useful for analysis, giving a response rate of 92.6%. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the returned questionnaire, and are presented in a simple percentage.

Table 1: Sample size determination

S/N	Agricultural Extension Workers in Osogbo zone	NO. Of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1	Irepodun Local Government Area	6 (6)	12.0
2	Osogbo Local Government Area	7 (7)	14.0
3	Olorunda Local Government Area	6 (5)	10.0
4	Egbedore Local Government Area	5 (4)	8.0
5	Ifelodun Local Government Area	7 (7)	14.0
6	Ifedayo Local Government Area	4 (4)	8.0
7	Odo-Otin Local Government Area	8 (7)	14.0
8	Boluwaduro Local Government Area	5 (5)	10.0
9	Boripe Local Government Area	6 (5)	10.0
TOTAL		54 (50)	100.0

The above table shows the sample determination of the extension worker in Osogbo zone, Osun State.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2: Demographic Profiles of Respondents

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Sex			
Male	38	76.0	76.0
Female	12	24.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	
Age			
<24	2	4.0	4.0
25-29	3	6.0	10.0
30-34	8	16.0	26.0
35-39	20	40.0	66.0
>40	17	34.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	
Marital Status			
Married	38	76.0	76.0
Single	5	10.0	86.0
Separated	2	4.0	90.0
Divorced	2	4.0	94.0
Widowed	3	6.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	
Department			
Agric and Food Security	31	62.0	62.0
Agriculture	19	38.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	
Academic Qualification			
<Degree	0	0	0
First Degree/HND	33	66.0	66
Master	27	34.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	
Professional Status			
Agricultural Extension Officer	32	64.0	64.0
Senior Agricultural Extension Officer	14	28.0	92.0
Principal Agricultural Extension Officer	3	6.0	98.0
Agricultural Extension Superintendent	1	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

From Table 2 above, males accounted for 76.0% respondents while females accounted for 24.0%. 40% of respondents were aged 35-39 years and were equally married. 62.0% of respondents were in the department of agricultural and food security. 66.0% had first degree/HND while 64.0% of respondents were agricultural extension officers.

Table 3: Information Needs of Extension Workers

Information Needs On	Extension workers		
	Needed (%)	More Needed (%)	Most Needed (%)
Farming Activities	0.0	18.0	82.0
Scientific Research	12.0	58.0	30.0
Community Health Development	4.0	64.0	32.0
Eradication of Rural Poverty	0.0	42.0	58.0
Education	14.0	56.0	30.0
Government Policy on Agriculture	2.0	72.0	26.0
Agro-Industries	4.0	76.0	20.0
Land Tenure System	48.0	50.0	2.0

Table 3 revealed that information about farming activities (82%) was the main information need of the agricultural extension workers in Osun State, it was followed by eradication of rural poverty (58.0%), while information about Agro-Industries and Land Tenure System was least sought.

Table 4: Information Seeking Behaviour

Information Seeking Behaviour	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Curiosity	6	12.0	12.0
Keep Abreast with Recent Development	12	24.0	36.0
Academic Purposes	3	6.0	42.0
Acquire more Knowledge	11	22.0	64.0
Desire for New Ideas	9	18.0	82.0
World of Entertainments	4	8.0	90.0
Politics	5	10.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Table 4 revealed that Agricultural Extension workers information seeking behaviour in Osun State, Nigeria was premised on their quest to keep abreast with recent development (24.0%), to acquire more knowledge (22.0%) and the desire for new ideas (18.0%), while for academic purposes was the least.

Table 5: Information Sources used by Extension Workers

Information Sources On	Extension workers		
	Often Use (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never Used (%)
Personal Collections	82.0	18.0	0.0
Research Institutes	32.0	68.0	0.0
Colleagues	86.0	14.0	0.0
Seminars/Workshops/Conferences	32.0	68.0	0.0
Lecture Notes	16.0	82.0	2.0
Scientific Journals	24.0	74.0	26.0
Library Materials	52.0	34.0	14.0
Radio Programmes	76.0	24.0	0.0
Television Programmes	76.0	24.0	0.0
Internet	16.0	70.0	14.0

Table 5 shows that the sources of information used by extension workers dwelt majorly on colleagues (86.0%), it was followed by personal collection (82.0%) and Radio & Television which had (76.0%) respectively. It is amazing that the respondents use the library on the average level, while scientific journals and internet were not fully used.

Table 6: Factors Influencing Choice of Information Sources

Factors Influencing Choice of Information	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Factors			
Accessibility to the Information Sources	6	12.0	12.0
Reliability of the Information Sources	9	18.0	30.0
Availability of the Information Sources	4	8.0	38.0
Affordability of the Information	3	6.0	44.0
Timeless of Information Sources	5	10.0	54.0
Adequacy of Information Sources	7	14.0	68.0
Ability of Sources to Meet the Information Need	10	20.0	88.0
Relevance of Information to the Problems at Hand	6	12.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Table 6 shows the results of the analysis of the factors influencing the agricultural extension workers' choice of information sources. However, the ability of sources to meet the information needs is the major (20.0%), this is followed by the reliability of the information

sources (18.0%), while the affordability of information (6.0%) has little influence on the choice of information sources by extension workers.

Table 7: Problems Facing Extension Workers while Sourcing for Information

Problems While Sourcing for Information	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Difficulty in Accessing Foreign Journal	2	4.0	4.0
Lack of Knowledge of Existence of Relevant Information	8	16.0	20.0
Non-Availability of Relevant Information	10	20.0	40.0
Materials are Written in Foreign Language	7	14.0	54.0
Lack of Accessibility of Information Resources	6	12.0	66.0
Not Being Computer Literate	3	6.0	72.0
Inadequate Information Retrieval Skills	4	8.0	80.0
Inadequate Current Information Materials	10	20.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

The result from Table 7 shows that non-availability of relevant information and inadequate current information materials (20.0%) respondents were the problems encountered most by agricultural extension workers when sourcing for information.

Table 8: Suggestion for Improving Extension Workers' Information needs, Sources and Seeking Behaviours

Improving Extension Workers' information needs, Sources and Seeking Behaviour	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
Establishment of Information Centres	6	12.0	12.0
Reducing the Cost of Obtaining Information	2	4.0	16.0
Making Information Sources Attractive	7	14.0	30.0
Ensuring that Extension Workers are Computer Literate	3	6.0	36.0
Educating Extension Workers on how to retrieve Information	4	8.0	44.0
Assisting Extension Workers to have Access to Foreign Books/Journals	3	6.0	50.0
Easy Access to Agricultural Research Centres	5	10.0	60.0
The government should Provide a Good and Accessible Database	20	40.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

The findings in table 8 reveal that the majority (40.0%) respondents suggested that government should provide a good and accessible database for extension workers, while (4.0%) respondents suggested that reducing the cost of obtaining information will go a long way to assist extension workers to have good information seeking behaviour.

DISCUSSION

As would have been expected, the population of the agricultural extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State, Nigeria are male-dominated as in many other places. This finding corroborates the work of Onwubuya et al (2015) that male-dominated the field of agricultural extension work in Nigeria. 40.0% of the agricultural extension workers were aged between 35-39 years, age means is 39.4 years. This could be speculated that this profession might not be attractive to the young graduates due to the nature of the work. The highest level of

education of the correspondents revealed that they are either First Degree or Master's certificate holders. Also, the agricultural extension workers in the study area seek information mostly on recent development and new ideas on agricultural practice. This finding is in support of the result of Suresh, et al (2011) that agricultural extension workers need a better understanding of the information need of farmers.

Personal Collections, Colleagues, Radio and Television programs were the sources of information used mostly extension workers in the study area. This finding agreed with Asiabaka, et al (2002) and Sobalaje (2011) that extension workers utilize different means to source for information such as radio, television and others. These were so because all these information sources were available and easily use. Also, the ability of information sources to meet the information needs and reliability of the information sources were the major factors influencing the choice of information sources. These findings agreed with the findings of Gholamreza, et al (2005) and Suresh, et al (2011) which stated that they need a fuller knowledge and understanding of information needs of farmers. Non-Availability of relevant information and inadequate current information sources were seen by extension workers in the study area as major problems confronting them. These agreed with what Ozowa (1995) and Adesoji, et al (2006) described in a similar study that irrelevancy and lack of current information materials lead to poor information seeking behaviour. It is regretted that the library, which is a collection of information, stored, organised and made ready for use are not fully consulted by the respondents.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provided empirical data on information needs, information sources and information seeking behaviour of agricultural extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that male respondents are more than their female counterpart in extension work and all the respondents were educated. Also, the agricultural extension workers in the study area seek information mostly on recent development and new ideas on agricultural practice. Personal Collections, Colleagues, Radio and Television programmes were the most sources of information by extension workers in the study area. Furthermore, the ability of information sources to meet the information needs and reliability of the information sources were the major factors influencing the choice of information sources. The study also discovered that non-availability of relevant information and inadequate current information sources were seen by extension workers in the study area as major problems confronting them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested to improve information needs, information sources and information seeking behaviour of agricultural extension workers in Osogbo zone of Osun State, Nigeria.

1. Both the three tiers of government should provide a good and accessible agricultural database to make it easier for agricultural extension workers to process formidable and reliable information for our local farmers.
2. Efforts should be geared towards the establishment of agricultural information centres for extension workers to obtain the latest information that will keep them abreast of recent development.

3. Better information communication tools should be provided at a bearable cost to make information sources attractive.
4. Concerted efforts should be made by the extension workers to work with agricultural research institutes such as IITA for knowledge improvement.

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