

ENHANCING RURAL FARMERS' ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN PLATEAU STATE: THE IMPERATIVES OF INDIGENOUS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

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Abstract

The paper examines the use of indigenous communication systems such as traditional theatre or drama, puppet performances, tales, proverbs, riddles and songs, etc, for passing agricultural information to rural farmers in Plateau State. Thus, the rationale behind the study is to determine whether indigenous communication systems are used to communicate agricultural information to the rural farmers in Plateau State. The paper adopts a mixed method; that is quantitative and qualitative research methods (Survey and focus group discussion) were adopted for the study. Questionnaire and focus group discussion guide were used as instruments of data collection. Findings show that the rural farmers do not have access to any information on agriculture. Findings further show that the rural farmers need information on agriculture. More so, the findings show that media generally are very important in providing information for enabling the rural community to make informed decision regarding their farming activities. Based on the findings, the paper concludes that indigenous communication systems are not used to pass agricultural information to rural farmers in Plateau State, hence the farmers do not have access to agricultural information. The paper therefore recommends, among others, that indigenous communication system should be employed as channels of communicating agricultural information to rural farmers, not only in Plateau State, but the entire country.

Key words: Indigenous communication systems, agriculture, information, rural farmers

Introduction

There is no doubt that the world is now a global village and this is due to the fact that information communication technology has revolutionalised the world in terms of information dissemination. Today, both the

traditional media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines) and social media (facebook, 2go, twitter, my space, etc), are used to disseminate information to both urban and rural populace, so as to

bring about development in all spheres of their lives. But what is however worrisome is that the rural dwellers do not have access to these media. For generations, rural populations living in isolated villages without access to modern means of communication have relied on the spoken word and traditional forms of communication as a means of sharing knowledge and information and providing entertainment. For illiterate rural women in particular, occasions for information exchange have consisted solely in local festivities, family gatherings, traditional and religious associations, interaction with itinerant merchants and encounters at marketplaces or water wells. Culture and history play an important role in the social development of a community. The preservation of traditional forms of communication and social change are not mutually exclusive. Traditional communication methods can be important channels for facilitating learning, behavioural change, people's participation and dialogue for development purposes. Indigenous media have been successfully adopted by change agents to promote rural development issues of relevance to women.

Rural farmers, as noted by CGIAR (1995) account for the greater part of the population of any developing country. Blait (1996) opines 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 short-comings of traditional print and library based methods (Van and Fortier, 2000) for providing such agricultural information to rural farmers who are generally illiterate and relatively remote from formal sources of information. Aina (2007) is 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. Thus, Nakabugu (2010) opines that there is need to keep the communities informed of what is happening in and around them in order for them to adapt to varying situations. Thus, the research set out to achieve the following objectives: To find out whether indigenous communication systems are used to communicate agricultural information to rural farmers in Plateau State, to assess the extent to which rural farmers need information on agriculture, to ascertain the areas the rural farmers need information and to find out the relevance of indigenous communication system in the communication of agricultural information.

Motivation for the Study

Traditional media like radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc, have also been used over the years to communicate certain innovations, including farming techniques to rural farmers in Nigeria and other parts of the world. However, the fact remains that rural people still lack basic communication infrastructure in accessing crucial information in order to make timely decisions about agriculture. This is perhaps because these rural farmers do not have access to such communication media that can help in solving problems of rural people and also to promote the agricultural production. Besides, rural farmers are cut off from agricultural communication via the traditional media and social media.

Moemeka (1985), cited in Asemah, et al (2013) notes that the use of English language by the electronic media is responsible for failure of development programmes in Africa as most development communication messages are still carried

out in English language, even when they are aimed at the rural dwellers. Despite the fact that radio and television sets are made available to Nigerians, research has shown that there are still by far, more English language programmes in Nigerian radio and television stations than local language programmes (Asemah, et al 2013). There is the need to intimate rural farmers with new farming techniques. When rural farmers lack access to knowledge and information that would help them achieve maximum agricultural yield, they are not only groping in the dark, but are driven to the urban centres in search of formal employment as the only option for survival (Munyua, 2000). Without information on new technologies and market opportunities, the poor in developing countries are being left even further behind. Media, therefore, can help bridge the gap. There are many ways to make information available to local people on agriculture. Indigenous communication systems can be effective and important means in rural communication. They are unique in nature, as they resemble the day-to-day life pattern of the rural masses; these media are a source of popular entertainment for the rural audience, in addition to providing instruction and information (Tiwari, Singh and Tiwari, 2010).

Farmers are facing many problems in rural areas, among which are lack of proper knowledge and information regarding agriculture; they are unaware and lack resources and have no idea on how to sell their products in the market. They have no knowledge about the use of pesticide, fertilizers and techniques of new technology in farming. Although, mass media are spreading very fast, but the non-availability of infrastructure such as electricity is one of the big problems. Farmers need to be

informed and educated about enhanced agricultural practices. Several channels such as extension agents, individuals and farmer-to-farmer, transfer information regarding awareness to agriculture. Electronic media radio, television, film, slides and film strips have been widely used to disseminate information to farmers in rural areas, but due to non-availability of electricity, farmers are still facing many problems to get the information about agriculture (van den Ban and Hawkins, 1992; Olowu and Oyedokun, 2000), cited in Chhachhar, Hassan, Omar and Soomro (2012). It is against this backdrop that the paper examines the need to use indigenous communication systems for agricultural communication in rural areas of Plateau State, Nigeria.

Conceptualisation of Indigenous Communication Systems

The concept "indigenous communication systems" has been variously called traditional communication system, folk media, primitive communication system and local media. Kombol (2002) avers that folk patterns of communication and social interaction in Africa are those ways of passing messages which are original to the African people as opposed to the modern communication methods. This implies that indigenous communication systems are organised processes of production and exchange of information managed by rural communities. These also include traditional theatre or drama, masks and puppet performances, tales, proverbs, riddles and songs. This perhaps explains why Chiovoloni (2004), cited in Daudu (2009) notes that they are cultural and endogenous responses to different community needs for information, education, social protest and entertainment. Indigenous system of

communication is seen as an admixture of social conventions and practices, which have become sharpened and blended into veritable communication modes and systems and which have almost become standard practices, modes of speech and social organisations whose chief concerns may not be with communication, but with other activities (Wilson, 1997), cited in Edegoh, Kenekchukwu and Asemah (2013). Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998, p.3), cited in Edegoh, Kenekchukwu and Asemah (2013) gives a comprehensive definition of this form of communication thus:

Any form of endogenous communication system, which by virtue of its origin, form and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilisation of the values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture, through its unique qualities and attributes.

Ansu-Kyeremeh's definition suggests that African traditional communication is embedded in the culture of the people. As noted by Akpabio (2003), cited in Edegoh, Kenekchukwu and Asemah (2013), it works along three principles: (1) It is part and parcel of the way of life of a people; (2) it utilises symbolism from the community and hence readily connects with the people; and (3) values of the community, as well as, age-old institutions, come into play in the communication process. This implies that the folk media are communication vehicles for promoting and improving dialogue which the common people or rural farmers employ to deliver their messages (Zwaal 2000, cited in Daudu, 2009). These messages embrace a wide range of traditional communication channels which include storytelling, theatre, folk songs, dance and folk puppetry

(Fernandez 1996; Van Den Ban and Hawkins 1996, cited in Daudu, 2009). According to Valbuena (1993), cited in Daudu (2009), folk media is entertainment communication because its performance such as storytelling, theatre shows, puppet shows and drama could facilitate development of agricultural extension programmes through the rapid diffusion of new technologies and its demonstrational values could serve as an effective vehicle for transmission of social messages.

Indigenous communication systems reflect in the various talking drums, the folk songs, drama, festivals, town criers, traditional wears, the artifacts, art works, paintings, stories and among others, cultural architecture that reflects in the palaces, shrines and African cities, towns and villages. Wilson (1999) avers that oramedia are the local means of communication that remain what essentially sustain the information needs of the population which represents over 70 percent of the national population in the rural areas. The messages and ideas are transmitted by means of itinerant dance and mime groups, puppet shows and other folk media which serve not only to entertain but to influence attitudes and behaviour.

Ugboajah, cited in Ebeze, (2002) sees indigenous communication as the products of the interplay between a traditional community's customs and conflicts, harmony and strife, cultural convergences and divergences, culture specific tangibles, interpersonal relations, symbols and codes and moral traditions which include methodology, oral literature (proverbs, story-telling, poetry), masquerades, witchcraft, rites, rituals, music, dance, drama, costumes and similar abstractions and artifacts, which encompass a people's factual, symbolic and cosmological existence from birth to death and even beyond death. Thus, Ndolo (2006), cited in

Asemah, Nwammuo and Edegoh (2013) sees the indigenous media as credible and acceptable channels of communication utilised by rural dwellers for various functions, including dissemination of messages. Thus, indigenous communication system may be seen as the system of communication used in the primitive days, but are still relevant in our contemporary society. They are the system of communication used by our forefathers, but they still remain relevant in our contemporary societies. The fact that we have radio, television and other modern mass media does not mean that we no longer use the flute, drum, etc, for information dissemination in the rural areas (Asemah, 2011).

Review of Related Literature

Stanley (1990), cited in Bello and Obinne (2012: 91) avers that information is one of the basic human needs after air, water, food and shelter. Cambe (1992), cited in Bello and Obinne (2012:91) asserts that man requires information to be able to manipulate factors of production such as land, labour and capital resources into meaningful and productive use. Similarly, Agbamu (2006) opines that information is the first and indispensable step of an adoption process. This implies that information is central to agriculture, as it will enable farmers to acquire more knowledge concerning agricultural production. But in Nigeria, rural farmers lack access to agricultural information. This explains why Obinne (1994) cited in Bello and Obinne (2012:91) maintains that the major setback in agricultural production in Nigeria is not lack of recommended practices needed for economic growth and rural transformation, but that of disseminating the recommended practices to end-users. Ango, et al (2013) also note that communication has been

acknowledged for playing a prominent role in the success of agricultural production and adoption of innovations.

The media generally can play an important role in the dissemination of information about education, health and agricultural development. It informs the farmers about weather forecast, as well as, the use of pesticides and indicate about flood situation and environmental changes in an area (Muhammad, 2005). Mahmood and Sheikh (2005) reported that mass media are playing very significant role in creating awareness and knowledge about latest agriculture technology information among farmers. Media are one of the best sources of spreading information about new technologies and new innovation of agriculture among farmers much faster than personnel contacts.

In rural development, information and knowledge are two significant factors. Local knowledge provides different ideas for agricultural as well as other changes. The information brought to the area contains fresh ideas and introduces new opportunities. Knowledge obtained from a specific research can motivate thinking and practices (Nazari and Hasbullah, 2010). Many researchers and educators have tested the understanding of farmers and other clients on the delivery of educational information (Trede and Whitaker, 1998; Caldwell and Richardson, 1995; Laughlin and Schmidt, 1995; cited in Nazari and Hasbullah, 2010). The outcomes of their studies indicate that different media and methods are used by extension educators to communicate new and emerging technologies to farmers. Azeez and Jimo (2003) examined the traditional media use in Forest conservation support communication (FCS) among local residents in protected areas in South Western Nigeria and observed that most (88.75%) of the respondent perceived trade-communication

as complementing other information sources and all respondents agreed that trade-communication was useful.

Greater exposure is likely to enhance awareness about the latest recommendations and to lead to farmers putting these recommendations into practice in a precise manner (Muhammad & Garforth 1995, cited in Das, 2012). Mass media and interpersonal communication can play an important role to disseminate information and also to create awareness among the rural farmers (Mahmood and Sheikh, 2005, cited in Das, 2012). Most times, traditional or indigenous knowledge helps the farmers a lot by transmitting information from person to person, so, any method of new development of information strategy must recognise it (Mundy and Compton, 1997). Similarly, Monu (1995) also argued that it must be based on the existing value and belief system of the community like the folk media so that the identification of networks of information flow provides deeper insight into the pattern of exchange of information in the farming community (Hossain 1998). Indigenous people have their own traditional songs, stories, legends, dreams, methods and practices as means of transmitting specific elements of indigenous knowledge (Alan, et al. 1997). These media are amenable to the transmission of exogenous knowledge.

Information is important for farmers to maintain livelihoods and to gain a competitive edge in a rapidly changing economic and production environment, where traditional farming methods might be ineffective to meet new demands (Morton & Matthewman, 1996). Modern day agriculture, however, operates in a complex and dynamic environment subject to a number of social, economic and environmental factors. Knowledge, as noted by Rogers & Shoemaker (1971) which belongs to the

cognitive domain of the human mind, is the first stage in the innovation–decision process. For agricultural development, knowledge and information on important farm technologies, methods and practices need to be imparted to the farmers at the right time. Traditional mass media, such as radio, television, print and recently, new media such as Internet have been playing a role in imparting knowledge to the farming community over the years. Their potential for influencing knowledge gain, public attitude and behaviours has been well recognised through several research studies (Prathap and Ponnusamy, n.d). Communication makes technical know-how accessible to increase knowledge about the production, transformation, organisation and marketing dimensions of agriculture. Improved agricultural technologies have been disseminated to rural farmers, using different communication channels. These include printed publications (newsletters, books, journals, leaflets, photo graphs, sketches, and posters), participatory resources (games, puzzles, theatre), interpersonal exchanges (meetings, seminars, conferences and interviews), traditional broadcast media (television, radio, video) and new technologies such as Internet, websites, on-line discussion groups, web logs, e-mails, data bases, mobile phones or web cams (McBean, 2005, cited in Okwu, and Iorkaar, 2011).

Sturges and Chimseu (1996:136), cited in Meyer and Boon (2003) avers that information science has neglected non-literate society. The provision of information to rural communities requires an understanding of the usefulness of information as a resource for development, as there seems to be general awareness that information is an important resource (Meyer and Boon, 2003). Boon (1992), cited in

Meyer and Boon (2003) cautions that a lack of information may retard development which may in turn, have a negative effect on human development. Concerning farming practices in rural communities, Ozonwa (1995) ascribes the low level of adoption of agricultural production technology among small scale farmers to the lack of information. This explains why Ekumankma and Nwankwo (2002) observe that the poor exposure of farmers to appropriate agricultural information is one of the major reasons for low yield recorded by many Nigerian farmers. Commenting on the relevance of information on agricultural development, (Ani et al. (1997), cited in Ariyo, et al (2013:86) note that:

Information and communication are essential ingredients needed for effective transfer of technologies that are designed to boost agricultural production. For farmers to benefit from such technologies, they must first have access to them and learn how to effectively utilise them in their farming systems and practices. This should be the function of agricultural extension agencies all over the world. These extension agencies make use of different approaches, means and media in transferring improved agricultural technologies to the end users (farmers). Mass media methods in agricultural information dissemination generally, are useful in reaching a wide audience at a very fast rate. They are useful as sources of agricultural information to farmers and as well, constitute methods of notifying farmers of new developments and emergencies. They could equally be important in stimulating farmers' interest in new ideas and practices.

Successful farming and agriculture require skill and as local economies are forced to adapt to global exposure, rural education is increasingly important to keeping the rural

poor both nourished and employed. At the same time, many rural schools operate tenuously, some relying on untrained or volunteer teachers necessarily disconnected from pedagogical training or dominance of the subject matter (Nnadi, Chikaire, Atoma, Egwuonwu, and Echetama, 2012). The role of communication boards on its effectiveness which is foundational to socio-economic and political development of a nation (Okoedo-Okojie and Orhiakhi, 2012). Adekunle and Ogoto (1994), cited in (Okoedo-Okojie and Orhiakhi, 2012) assert that effective communication is a precondition for sustainable technology transfer in agriculture; and the feed forward- feedback mechanisms which are essential ingredients in the technology transfer process, are only made possible through communication process. Traditional extension methods have only had limited success in promoting the widespread adoption of new management practices and technology (Röling, 1988; Vanclay & Lawrence, 1994; 1995), cited in Jan, Sultan and Ali (n.d). Radio is currently utilised more than television by most farmers, they perceive that the television programme is providing very useful content (Mohammed Kuta Yahaya, 2002), cited in Jan, Sultan and Ali, n.d).

Theoretical Underpinning

The paper is anchored on knowledge gap theory and diffusion of innovation theory

Knowledge Gap Theory

Tichenor, et al at the University of Minnesota proposed the theory in the 1970s. They believed that every member of the society does not evenly acquire the increase of information in society. People with higher socio-economic status tend to

have a better ability to acquire information. This has brought about two groups- a group of better-educated people who know more about things and those with low education who know less. The theory, therefore, assumes that the spread of information in a society can bring about an increase in gap between people of lower and higher socio-economic status. The attempt to improve people's life might not always work the way it is planned. Mass media might have the effect of increasing the different gaps between members of a social class. The knowledge gap theory of the mass media simply holds that the more media information increases in our social system, the more the knowledgeable in our society gets more knowledge, thereby creating a gap between the more educated and less educated. Tichenor, et al, cited, in Orewere (2006) note that higher socio-economic segments of a population acquire information from the mass media faster than the lower socio- economic segments, thus, increasing the differences in the amount of knowledge held by the two segments. Folarin (1998) concurs when he notes that the knowledge gap theory asks two basic questions: how is the knowledge distributed in the society and how do the media influence that distribution?

The theory is relevant to this paper because it says that the spread of information through traditional and social media create a wide gap between the rich and poor in the society; thus, in order to disseminate information to the rural farmers in Plateau State, there is need to use indigenous communication system, since most of these rural dwellers do not have access to such media.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The theory was proposed by Lazarsfeld, et al in 1944. This theory traces the process by which a new idea or practice is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. The theory describes the factors that influence people's thoughts and actions and the process of adopting a new technology or idea. Diffusion, as noted by Asemah (2011) is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among members of a social system. Diffusion of innovation theory therefore attempts to explain how an innovation is spread and why it is adopted at both the micro and macro levels of analysis. The four main elements in the diffusion of innovation process are: innovation, communication channels, time and social system.

The essence of diffusion of innovation theory is to communicate to members of a social system a discovery or ideas based on research. However, critics of the theory observed that the mass media cannot convince people as such to an extent instead, they said that mass media and interpersonal communication be combined to give effective result. The theory is therefore relevant to the study because it lays emphasis on combining interpersonal communication with mass media for the purpose of disseminating information to people. Thus, indigenous communication systems ought to be used to pass agricultural information to rural farmers in Plateau State.

Methods and Materials

The paper adopts a mixed research method; that is, quantitative and qualitative research methods for the study. Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion Guide were used as

instruments of data collection. The choice of mixed method is based on the fact that the use of two or more methods in a single study provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. This is in line with Creswell and Clark (2007) who note that the mixed method focuses on collecting, analysing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. The population of the study is made up of farmers in three local government areas purposively selected from each of the three senatorial zones in Plateau State and students of mass communication of the two tertiary institutions in Jos metropolis, University of Jos and Plateau State Polytechnic. The purposive sampling was used to select the population of the study. Farmers in the three local government areas were selected because they need information on agriculture; thus, it is assumed that they will be in a better position to provide information on having access to agricultural information. Students of mass communication of Plateau State Polytechnic and University of Jos were selected because they have knowledge of communication, thus, they will be in a better position to provide information on the prospects, relevance and challenges of indigenous communication system as tools for agricultural communication. For the Focus Group Discussion, thirty participants were invited for the discussion and the discussion took place at the community hall of the villages. For the survey, a sample size of one hundred respondents was chosen. This comprised of 40 level mass communication students of the University of Jos and Diploma 2 mass communication students of Plateau State Polytechnic, Jos. The simple random sampling was used to

select the one hundred respondents. The simple random sampling was used because it gives every respondent in a population equal opportunity of being selected.

The researchers collected data through personal administration of the questionnaire, electronic recording of responses from the participants in the focus group discussion and through different literature reviews and articles. Out of the one hundred (100) copies of questionnaire distributed, ninety eight were retrieved.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Extent to which indigenous communication systems are used for agricultural communication in Plateau State

Variables	Frequency	%
To a very great extent	Nil	0%
To a great extent	Nil	0%
To a very low extent	15	15%
To a low extent	29	30%
Not at all	54	55%
Total	98	100%

The table above shows that indigenous communication systems are not used for agricultural communication in Plateau State. This is evident in the majority of the respondents who ticked not at all. Out of the 98 respondents that returned their questionnaire, none ticked to a very great extent, none ticked great extent, 15 respondents, which represent 15% ticked to a very low extent, 29 (30%) ticked to a low extent while the remaining 54 respondents, which represents 55% ticked not at all. This, therefore, implies that indigenous communication systems are not used for agricultural communication in Plateau State.

Table 2: Rural farmers in Plateau State need information on agriculture

Responses	Frequency	%
Strongly agreed	52	53%
Agreed	44	45%
Undecided	2	2%
Disagreed	Nil	0%
Strongly disagreed	Nil	0%
Total	98	100%

Out of the 98 respondents that returned their copies of questionnaire, 52 (53%) strongly agreed that rural farmers in Plateau State need information on agriculture, 44 (45%) agreed, 2 (2%) respondents were undecided while none of the respondents ticked disagreed and strongly disagreed. This, therefore, shows that rural farmers actually need agricultural information.

Table 3: Extent to which rural farmers in Plateau State need agricultural information

Variables	Frequency	%
To a very great extent	77	79%
To a great extent	21	21%
To a very low extent	Nil	16%
To a low extent	Nil	0%
Not at all	Nil	0%
Total	98	100%

Table 3 shows the responses on the extent to which rural farmers in Plateau State need agricultural information. 77 (79%) respondents were of the opinion that it was to a very great extent, 21 (21%) were of the opinion that it was to a great extent while none of the respondents ticked to a very low extent, low extent and not at all. This shows that the extent to which rural farmers in Plateau State need agricultural information is very great.

Table 4: Areas the rural farmers need agricultural information

Variables	Frequency	%
Agricultural input	9	9%
Extension education	10	10%
Agricultural technology	15	15%
Agricultural credit	8	8%
Marketing	14	14%
All of the above	42	44%
Total	98	100%

Table 4 shows the responses on the areas the rural farmers in Plateau State need agricultural information. The responses show that the farmers need information on agricultural input, extension education, agricultural technology, agricultural credit and marketing. This is evident in the highest number of respondents who ticked all of the above (44%).

Table 5: Agricultural information is relevant to rural farmers

Responses	Frequency	%
Strongly agreed	49	50%
Agreed	43	43%
Undecided	6	7%
Disagreed	Nil	0%
Strongly disagreed	Nil	0%
Total	98	100%

Out of the 98 respondents that returned their questionnaire, 49 (50%) strongly agreed that agricultural information is relevant to rural farmers, 43 (43%) agreed, 6 (7%) ticked undecided while none ticked disagreed and strongly disagreed. This, therefore, shows that agricultural information is relevant to rural farmers.

Findings from the focus group discussion show that indigenous communication

systems are not used to communicate agricultural information to rural farmers in Plateau State. The discussants said, instead radio, television and other media are used to communicate such messages. One of the participants said that the use of such media has made them not to have access to agricultural information, as majority of them do not understand English language and the programmes are often produced in English language; one of the respondents specifically mentioned that he has been farming for the past twenty five years and has never had any communication on agriculture. Mr. Pam, one of the participants in the focus group discussion noted that:

As farmers who farm in the villages, it is as if they are totally cut off from the society. He said that they have no access to television, Internet facilities; but that they have access to radio and the problem they have with using the radio is that most of them do not understand English whereas, radio programmes are produced in English language.

Mr. Harrison responded that:

Since they do not have access to these traditional media, it is believed that their indigenous communication systems can be used to pass agricultural information. He however said that indigenous communication systems are not used to communicate agricultural information to them; but that the system of communication are still been used.

Another participant in the focus group discussion from Langang local government corroborates Mr. Harrison when he said that:

Indigenous communication systems are still been used in their villages to pass message from the chiefs to the community.

All the respondents however maintained that the use of indigenous communication system for agricultural information will go a long way in helping them to understand the latest farming techniques.

Findings from both the questionnaire and focus group discussion show that rural farmers generally need information on agriculture; all the participants in the focus group discussion at the three senatorial zones said that they need information on agriculture. One of the participants said that such information will go a long way in helping them to farm better. Mr. Joel said:

We understand the relevance of information to them, but since such information does not come to them, there was nothing they could do about it.

The findings from the questionnaire further show that rural farmers to a very large extent need information on agriculture as majority of them attested to this.

Findings from the questionnaire and focus group discussion show that there are several areas where rural farmers need information about agriculture. Responses from the focus group discussion and the questionnaire show that rural farmers need information on: agricultural inputs; extension education; agricultural technology; agricultural credit and marketing. The needs are highlighted below:

- i. **Agricultural Input:** Modern farm inputs are needed to raise small farm productivity. These inputs may include fertilizers, improved variety of seeds and seedlings, feeds, plant protection chemicals, agricultural machinery and equipment and water. An examination of the factors influencing the adoption and continued use of these inputs will show that information dissemination is a very

important factor. It is a factor that requires more attention than it now gets.

ii. **Extension Education:** The general lack of awareness among farmers can be attributed to their high level of illiteracy. This contributes to the low level of adoption of agricultural production technology. Extension is a type of education which is functional, rather than formal. It is better provided by extension workers whose main task is to convey information in a meaningful form to farmers. One of the ways they do this is by training a group of model farmers with the hope that such farmers come in contact with other farmers.

iii. **Agricultural Technology:** Agricultural technology for the rural farmers must help minimise the drudgery of farm chores. It should be labour-saving, labour-enhancing and labour-enlarging. The farmer needs information on production technology that involves cultivating, fertilising, pest control, weeding and harvesting.

iv. **Agricultural Credit:** Agricultural credit encompasses all loans and advances granted borrowers to finance and service production activities relating to agriculture, fisheries and forestry and also for processing, marketing, storage and distribution of products resulting from these activities. Small scale farmers are among the potential beneficiaries of agricultural credit in Nigeria, but because of their low level of literacy they are mostly unaware of existing loan facilities. To reap the benefit of credit, farmers need information relating to sources of loan, such as names of lenders, location and types of existing credit sources. They need information on the terms of loans such as the interest rates, loanable amount and mode of repayment. Information

regarding agricultural credit gets to small scale farmers usually through channels such as relations, friends, neighbours, government officials, commercial and credit banks. Grassroot organs such as village heads and local government officials are used to diffuse such information because of their personal touch with small scale farmers.

v. **Marketing:** All business activities involved in the movement of commodities from production to consumption is marketing. The farmer's market information needs are those that enable him make rational and relevant decisions. Market information services have the function of collecting and processing market data systematically and continuously and of making it available to market participants in a form relevant to their decision making. Market information needs of small scale farmers include:

- Information on product planning. This is information on what crop and variety to grow at a given season with marketability of such a crop as an important deciding factor.
- Information on current prices.
- Information on forecast of market trends. This type of information assists farmers in planning their market products.
- Information on sales timing. This assists farmers in ensuring that they do not cause a market glut. It enables them to stagger harvesting and quantity for marketing.
- Information on improved marketing practices. It includes information on improved harvesting methods. This information is disseminated by field level extension workers by

- demonstration on farmer's fields, at local and wholesale markets.
- Information on group marketing. This enables small scale farmers to have organised sales of marketable surplus and bulk transport of produce.

Findings show that media generally are very important in providing information for enabling the rural community to make informed decision regarding their farming activities. Information, as we know is the key for success in the operation and management process of the agriculture activities. To a large extent, indigenous communication systems serve as veritable instruments for information dissemination in agriculture. Indigenous communication systems have the capacity to uplift the knowledge and having impact on behaviour. The potency of these channels can be exploited for infotainment of farming community. Media generally are playing very important role in creating awareness about new agricultural technologies among farmers. Thus, indigenous communication systems can be used to spread agricultural technologies to the farmers. Indigenous communication systems can help farmers in the transfer of new information and technologies. It is important to note that oramedia are highly effective than all other means of communication, because they are interactive, inter-personal, combine verbal communications with non-verbal codifications and they are simple, natural and less expensive. The high content of non-verbal components in oramedia actually makes them to be more effective because non-verbal communicates the mind more than verbal.

One unique thing about oramedia is the immediate feedback, which makes

communication to be effective. Oramedia are highly effective in the dissemination of information among the peoples of Africa. They are embedded in the cultural values and tradition of the people through body language, signs, and objects. Indeed, oramedia is culturally-based, as it is natural with the tradition and customs of the people. It involves their language, dialect, individual occupation or family occupation or communal occupation. So, people of another culture may not necessarily understand the message within a particular oramedia, because it is culturally situated and conditioned.

Summary and Conclusion

The study investigated the access of rural farmers in Plateau State to agricultural information. The findings of this study show that the farmers do not really have access to agricultural information because traditional media and social media are used to communicate such information, if at all they do. The use of English language by the electronic media is responsible for failure of development programmes in Africa. Most development communication messages are still carried out in English language, even when they are aimed at the rural dwellers. Despite the fact that radio and television sets are made available to Nigerians, research has shown that there are still by far, more English language programmes in Nigerian radio and television stations than local language programmes. Virtually all the broadcast programmes in our stations are produced in English language. This implies that the rural dwellers are not taken into consideration; thus, they do not have access to development programmes. Therefore going by the findings of the study, the paper concludes that rural farmers in Plateau State

do not have access to agricultural information.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, therefore, the paper gives the following recommendations:

1. There is need to use indigenous communication systems to communicate agricultural related information to rural dwellers, not only in Plateau State, but in Nigeria as a whole. This is because farmers now need information about the trend and technology needed in farming, so as to

produce more and participate effectively in setting price of their product.

2. Users of indigenous communication channels should endeavour to use the right strategies to pass the message across to the rural farmer.
3. Community media, like community radio and community television stations should be established in the rural communities as this will also help a great deal, just like indigenous communication system, in passing agricultural information to rural dwellers.

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