

Farmers' Perception of the Agricultural Information Resource Centre at Ago-Are, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study assessed farmers' perception of the agricultural information resource centre at Ago Are, Oyo State, Nigeria as a source of information for improving agricultural productivity. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from 60 farmers who were randomly selected. The findings show that majority of the respondents (75%) are males and about fifty six percent of them were between the ages of 25 to 50 years. Majority of the respondents (68.3%) had no formal education while 51.2% had more than 25 years farming experience. Respondents mostly used information board, video presentation and the radio programme at the centre. The most frequently sought information is on fertilizer application, harvesting methods and market information. Internet usage by the farmers was found to be low due to the frequent break down of the computers in the centre. Most of the respondents perceive the centre as an important means of getting information needed to boost their agricultural production. There was a significant relationship between the type of information sought and respondents' perception of the resource centre ($r = 0.28$; $P > 0.05$). A need to organize frequent training for farmers and adequate maintenance of resource centre's facilities to avoid constant breakdown were recommended.

Keywords: Information, perception, resource centre.

INTRODUCTION

Information has been identified as an important and crucial variable in the development process. This makes it imperative to provide adequate, relevant and up-to-date information in order to transform agricultural production in many developing countries. Adebayo (2006) posited that agricultural information is no doubt central in enhancing agricultural productivity and facilitating poverty alleviation among rural farmers. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has been identified to have capacity to empower rural

farmers and enable them to make contribution to the development process (Munyua, 2000). According to Balit, (1998), "with new ICTs, rural communities can acquire the capacity to improve their living conditions and become motivated through training and dialogue with others to a level where they make decisions for their own development." Munyua (2000) also indicated that giving rural people a voice means giving them opportunity to express their views and opinions and become part of the decision making process. She posited that the new ICTs

have played a major role in diffusing information to rural communities.

Therefore, in order to address the current food crises in Nigeria, there is the need to ensure ready access to available and readily useable information by those requiring such information. Njoku and Ndeche (1999) asserted that agricultural and rural development should encompass a shift from the traditional techniques of agricultural production activities to new science-based methods, involving also new technological components, cultural practices, new crops and breeds of livestock and farming systems, but this can only be achieved when there has been a properly organised and communicated utilisable data and information. Furthermore, Ochu (2000) opined that the importance of proper information dissemination is regarded as a vital ingredient for promoting agricultural and rural development. Traditionally, in many African countries, the main sources of information to farmers are extension agents, radio, friends and relatives (Banmeke and Olowu, 2005). Munyua (2000) indicated that the weak linkages between researchers, extension workers and farmers have been a major constraint that has resulted in research findings not being applied by poor rural farmers. However, it has been found that ICTs can improve and strengthen these linkages which will also improve rural people's knowledge and information and subsequently improve food security (Munyua, 2000). According to Richardson (2003), there is general interest in exploring the Information and Communication Technologies as a cost-effective extension tool

for information delivery and knowledge sharing among farmers.

According to Van Crowder and Fortier (2000), "in Latin America, FAO has applied ICTs in a project to establish farmer information networks – FARMNets - involving agricultural producers and farmer associations, extension services and NGOs in Chile and Mexico. Essential information on inputs, prices, markets, weather and credit are exchanged through the electronic network (via the Internet) to farmer organisations, co-operatives and local government. The project also provided training on how to analyze, retrieve and disseminate information of local relevance using ICTs." In a similar vein, the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria managed a project called Information and Communication Support for Agricultural Growth in Nigeria (ICS-Nigeria) funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project aimed to increase the quantity and quality of information available for increased agricultural production, processing and marketing. It also aimed to strengthen the capacity of farmer assistance organizations to package and disseminate information on agricultural technologies to farmers for poverty alleviation (Adekunle *et al*, 2004). In facilitating its vision, ICS Nigeria set up farmer resource centres in Nigeria where ICTs could be easily harnessed by the rural farmers assisted by extension workers to obtain information on agriculture which they can apply to help boost their productivity and standard of living. However, only the resource centre in Ago Are, Oyo State is functioning presently. Therefore, assessing the perception of

farmers that use this centre on the usefulness of the resource centre and the quality of information obtained is necessary to rectify emergent problems and make necessary improvements that will meet the needs of the farmers. It would also serve as a guide for the subsequent centres to be set up. The findings of this study could also provide insights into the effectiveness of integrating information resource centre model into the state-wide extension service programme.

Objectives of the Study

This main objective of the study was to assess respondents' perception of the Farmers Resource Centre at Ago Are, Oyo State, Nigeria as a source of information for improving agricultural productivity. The specific objectives were to:

- i. describe the personal characteristics of the farmers that use the resource centre.
- ii. ascertain the level of use of the facilities at the resource centres' facilities.
- iii. identify the types of information sought by the respondents from the resource centre.
- iv. assess the farmers' perception of the resource centre.
- v. ascertain the problems encountered by the farmers in using the resource centre

Hypotheses of the Study

- i. There is no significant relationship between the farmers' personal characteristics (age, sex, educational level) and their perception of the centre.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between the type of information sought

by farmers and their perception of the resource centre.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Oyo State located in South West Nigeria in 2006. The state covers an approximate area of about 35,743km². The climate is tropical in nature with the raining season between April and October and the dry season between November and March. The resource centre is located at Ago-are in the northern part of Oyo State which is a major agricultural zone of the state. The research design was a descriptive survey method. All the farmers that make use of the resource centre constitute the population of this study and the list of farmers was obtained from the register in the resource centre. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 60 farmers from a total of 98 farmers registered in the centre.

A structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The copies of the questionnaire were administered by enumerators with the assistance of the resident extension officer in retrieving some copies of the questionnaire. However, only 42 copies of the questionnaire were returned which was said to be due to the unavailability of the farmers. Forty one copies of the questionnaire were found useful for analysis. Both content and face validity of the instrument were established by a panel of experts consisting of faculty members. A pilot test was conducted with 10 farmers. The questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Cronbach's alpha which was found to be 0.87. Farmers' perception of the resource centre was ascertained using a 5-point Likert-

type rating scale on a list of twenty (20) perception statements. Data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations. Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used in drawing inferences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Characteristics

The personal characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. Findings in Table 1 indicates that 75% of the farmers that use the centre are male which is not surprising because males tend to associate more than their female counterparts due to cultural reasons in the study area. A little above half of the respondents were between the ages of 25 to 50 years (56.1%) which is an indication that they are in the active age. Also, 68.3% of these farmers had no formal education, while 51.2% had more than 25 years farming experience.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to their personal characteristics (N= 41)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	31	75.6
Female	10	24.4
Age (years)		
Below 25	5	12.2
25 to 50	23	56.1
Above 50	13	31.7
Educational level		
No formal education	28	68.3
Adult education	2	4.9
Primary education	3	7.3
Secondary education & above	8	19.5
Farming experience (Years)		
Less than 5	5	12.2
5 to 10	5	12.2
11 to 25	10	24.4
Above 25	21	51.2

Source: Field survey 2006

Level of use of the centre's facilities by the respondents

The level of use of the facilities of the resource centre is presented in Table 2. Results indicate that the information board (M = 3.05) is the facility that is often used by the respondents. This may be attributed to the fact that there are a number of such boards strategically placed in different locations in the community which makes it easily accessible to the farmers. Also, video presentations (M = 2.61) were frequently used by the farmers. This may be due to easy understanding of the video presentations as they found it very explanatory. Radio broadcast of information was also rated third. This is not unexpected as radio has been found to be a major source of information to farmers in South West Nigeria (Ajayi, 2003). The result shows that the use of Internet is not yet popular even though the facility is available at the centre. This may not be unconnected with the consistent break down of computer and the low level of education of the respondents which will make it difficult to access information on their own as they depend mostly on the resident extension officer for now.

Table 2: Frequency of use of the centres' facilities by the respondents

Facilities	Mean(M)	Standard deviation
Information board	3.05	1.16
Video presentation	2.61	1.24
Radio broadcast	2.49	1.18
Community help desk	2.46	1.28
Television broadcast	2.41	1.22
Internet	2.34	1.31
Rental facility	2.07	1.03

Source: Field survey 2006

Likert type scale: Regularly 4, Occasionally 3, Rarely 2, Never 1.

Types of information sourced in the resource centre

Findings in Table 3 shows that information on fertilizer (M = 3.75), harvesting time and methods (M =3.69) and market (M = 3.58) are the most regularly sourced information at the centre. They also occasionally sourced for information on many other farming activities such as time of planting, new crop varieties, sources of planting materials, processing methods and training programme.

Table 3: Types and frequency of information sought by respondents in the resource centre

Information types	Means(M)	Standard deviation
Fertilizer application and agents	3.75	0.92
Harvesting time and methods	3.69	0.86
Market information	3.58	0.65
Time of planting and spacing	3.28	0.88
New crop varieties	3.23	0.74
Planting materials sources	3.14	0.82
Processing methods	2.95	0.99
Training programme	2.79	0.95
News	2.78	1.13
Storage and preservation of crops	2.78	1.13
Income generating activities	2.65	1.18
Agrochemical agents	2.56	0.79
Rural enterprise development	2.40	1.03
Credit sources	2.39	1.02
Weather forecast	2.14	1.04
Entertainment	1.95	1.03

Source: Field survey 2006

Scale: Regularly = 4, Occasionally = 3, Rarely = 2, Never = 1

Respondents' perception of the farmers' resource centre

Results in Table 4 indicate the respondents' perception of the farmers' resource centre. Respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with most of the statements provided. The first rated ones are that the farmers have benefited a lot from the centre (M =4.37), the centre is an important source of obtaining information (M = 4.24) and that the centre has enhanced farmers' agricultural productivity (M = 4.24). This reveals that the farmers have a high perception about the usefulness of the resource centre in meeting their needs and enhancing their productivity. However, there are some of the statements that respondents agreed with that need to be given special attention such as the rental facilities are too expensive (M = 3.46). This is because this factor can affect the usefulness of the centre just as it was pointed out in Table 5 that breaking down of computers was one of the major constraints faced by respondents in using the centre.

Table 4: Respondents' perception of the resource centre

Perception statements	Mean	Standard deviation
I benefit a lot from the centre	4.37	0.94
The centre is an important source of obtaining information	4.24	0.91
The centre has enhanced my agricultural productivity	4.24	0.91
The staff of the centre are friendly	4.24	0.79
I get relevant and up-to-date information	4.22	0.85
The staff often assist with the facilities	4.15	0.82
The centres' TV & video presentations are educative	4.05	1.07

The centre is easily accessible	4.02	1.08
I enjoy spending my free time at the centre	3.90	1.06
I often find solution to my production problems at the centre	3.83	1.30
The staff are proficient and efficient	3.83	1.01
The centre is not too far from my home	3.76	1.01
The centre is well organized	3.51	1.18
The rental facilities are too expensive	3.46	1.20
The centre is not a recreational place	3.44	1.51
The environment at the centre is conducive	3.39	1.35
The centre has sufficient facilities	3.22	1.45
The facilities are not too sophisticated	2.76	1.48
The centre has sufficient number of staff	2.71	1.32
The centre's facilities function properly	2.63	1.51

Source: Field survey 2006
Likert-type scale: Strongly disagree = 1, disagree =2, undecided =3, agree =4, strongly agree =5.

Problems encountered by respondents in using the resource centre

The major problem often encountered in using the facilities of the resource centre is presented in Table 5. The main problem usually faced by the farmers is the frequent breakdown of the computer facility (M = 3.72). Also, the respondents noted that the rental equipment are inadequate (M = 2.83). This may be attributed to the insufficiency of staff that is well grounded in computer operations. Furthermore, the centre seems not to be able to provide enough farm machinery for hire to the farmers.

Table 5: Gravity of problems encountered by the respondents at the resource centre

Problems	Means	Standard deviation
Computer breakdown	3.72	1.87
Inadequate rental facilities	2.83	1.78
Complexity of equipment	1.95	1.62
Language problem	1.68	1.60
Excessive protocol	1.71	1.45
Non-cooperation of staff	1.27	1.09

Source: Field survey 2006
Likert type scale: Very serious = 5, Serious =4, Undecided =3, Not serious =2, Not a problem = 1

Relationship between farmers' personal characteristics and their perception of the resource centre

Findings in Table 6 show that there are no significant associations between age ($\chi^2 = 3.145$; $P > 0.05$), sex ($\chi^2 = 0.680$; $P > 0.05$), educational level ($\chi^2 = 5.851$; $P > 0.05$) and the farmers' perception of the resource centre. This finding reveals that farmers' age, sex and educational level do not affect the perception about the resource centre by the farmers. Some of the results are not unexpected because the resource centre is expected to be accessible to a wide variety of people irrespective of their age, sex but it is surprising that the level of education is not significant as it is expected that those with higher education will have a higher perception than those with low education (Adekoya and Ajayi (2000).

Table 6: Relationship between farmers' personal characteristics and perception of the resource centre

Variables	df	Chi-square value	Decision
Sex	1	0.678	Not significant
Age	2	3.145	Not significant
Educational level	3	5.851	Not significant

Source: Field survey 2006

Relationship between the type of information sought by respondents and their perception of the Farmers' resource centre

Result of the correlation analysis indicates a positive and a significant relationship between the type of information sought by the farmers and the perception of the resource centre ($r = 0.28$; $P < 0.05$). This finding is not unexpected because the type of information received from the centre might affect the perception one has about the centre.

Table 7: Relationship between the type of information sought and the perception of the resource centre by farmers

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Types of information sought	0.28	0.004	significant

Source: Field survey 2006

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results presented here show that farmers have a good perception of agricultural information resource centre as they perceive the centre as an important means of getting up-to-date information needed to boost their agricultural production. However, the use of Internet by the farmers is still very low due to the frequent break down of the computers in the

centre and probably low level of education of the farmers. It can therefore be posited that resource centre is becoming a more veritable tool that can be utilized in information dissemination in the developing countries just as it has been in the developed countries. Therefore it is recommended that:

- i. Similar resource centres should be established in a pilot scheme in some other parts of the country so as to integrate it into the extension delivery system of the country.
- ii. There is a need to organize frequent training for farmers in the use of the centre's facilities.
- iii. There is a need for adequate maintenance of the centre's facilities to avoid constant breakdown which could lead to a low perception of such centres by farmers.
- iv. Resource centres when established should only play a complementary role with extension personnel as the importance of personal contact cannot be undermined in extension delivery.

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