



Access to Information and Communication Media by Women Farmers in Benue State Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigated the level of accessibility to information and communication media by women farmers in Benue State Nigeria. The socio-economic distribution of the respondents as well as the male and female labour contribution to staple crops moderation in the areas studied were also determined. The study was conducted in Kwande, Guma and Ogbadibo Local Government Areas. Questionnaires and interview were used for data collection. The findings showed that women (69.0%) within the middle age group engaged in farming activities (52.0%) of the women completed primary education while (7.0%) had the highest annual income of N20,000 and above. The findings also showed that women (65.0%) contributed labour in planting soyabean while women (95.0%) also contributed labour in planting and harvesting melon. The result indicated also that women farmers in Benue State own various types of information and communication media, particularly radio set (53.0%) and television sets (37.0%). The identical topic where information was required included, chemicals and agricultural input, food processing and preservation technology and agricultural credit. For the majority of the respondent's access to information and communication media was not impressive due to high cost of the media and high rate of illiteracy other. The paper recommended that government and private organization should subsidizes the cost of these media for women and present in local languages.

Keywords: Female Laour, Agricultural production, Farming activities, Information and communication media

Introduction

There has been a growing awareness among agricultural research ~~eract~~ development practitioners and farmers that the use of agricultural technologists and innovation such as pesticides, inorganic fertilizer, animal feedstuff and tractors and other machinery in farming activities enhances high yield and productivity (Akello and Sarr, 1999). The success of these technologies in increasing yield on high-potential lands has been so great that farmers, researchers and policy makers alike have been quick to use modern input on maginal land as well (Marc, Kestall et al, 1996).

According to Ogbonna and Midifon (2003) knowledge of the technologies and consequent access to them are the keys to their acceptance and adoption. Therefore access to information and communication media by women farmers in Benue State, Nigeria is a welcome development.

Information and communication media are now increasingly being used to disseminate information on agricultural research and their potential for economic development is becoming more explicit. In the area of agriculture, radio, for instance, assists in facilitating access to and adoption of technologies by farmers

through the creation of awareness on the potential of agricultural technologies in increasing high yield. Consequently, enhancing access to information and communication media is considered an integral part of strengthening agricultural production of farmers, especially women farmers.

It is often argued that women's lower level of human and physical capital development results in their inability to economic and technological incentives. Much of the evidence cited to support this argument comes from agriculture (Quisumbin, 1996). The prevailing opinion, according to Ogunwale (2003), is that agriculture as an occupation is the preserve of the man folk, but recent studies on the role of women in agriculture revealed that women contribute far more to agricultural production than has been generally recognized.

FAO(1984), for instance, stated that women contribute two-third of all hours spent in traditional African agriculture and 3/5 of the time spent in marketing agricultural produce. Women typically work longer than men when producing food. On the average, they work 13 hours more than men each week in Asia and Africa. They grow and sell 80 -90% of this food and up to 80% of all fish and shellfish caught by local fish-fold are washed, dried, smoked and marketed by women and children (CTA, 1998).

In a related study, FAO (1999) stated that in that social environment, many new trends and emerging in Sub-Saharan African with regard to health, population and access to information and other resources. FAO further asserts that these changes have had a profound impact on the role of women in agriculture. Specifically, women now constitute the majority of smallholder farmers, their small-scale farmsteads on daily basis.

However, the key role played by women in agricultural production is not yet adequately reflected in national and international policies. According to CTA (1998), less than 1% of the project of the FAO actually included strategies for reaching women in the United Nations System as a whole, less than 4% of the projects benefit women. Quisumbing (1996) posits that men receive most of the agricultural extension services, new technologies, credit and have more access to information and communication media while women are the caretakers of the food supply.

Despite the tremendous prospects for growth and development by women in agriculture in Nigeria Saito (1996) noted, that the diffusion of their access to agriculture and technologies and innovation through information and communication media is advancing at a pace slower than desired. ✓

This study was designed to investigate the accessibility to information and communication media among women farmers in the study area. The specific objectives in the study were to:

1. Identify the socio-economic and personal characteristics of the samples women farmers.

2. Identify the types of information and communication media used in the area.
3. Ascertain the extent of ownership of functional information and communication media.
4. Identify the level of accessibility of the media by women.
5. Identify problems associated with access to information and communication media.

Methodology

The study was conducted in three local government areas of Benue State, Nigeria, namely: Kwande, Guma and Ogbadigbo, selected from the three (3) senatorial zones of the state. In Kwande, the respondents came from Jato-Aka and Achia. The respondents from Guma came from Udei and Daudu, while respondents from Ogbadigbo came from Orokam and Otukpa. The respondents were randomly selected for this study.

The main intension for selecting the study area was that farming is the predominant occupation in the area like others. It was expected, therefore, that this study would provide a baseline information for designing future information and communication strategies in disseminating improved agricultural technologies to farmers in the region. An interview schedule was prepared for this survey in addition to questionnaire for the respondents, which contained pertinent items designed to elicit information towards the achievement of the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 show that majority of the respondents who were within the middle age group 69.0% engaged in farming activities most of the farmers (52.0%) completed their primary education, while 7.0% had the highest annual income of N20,000 and above. Although education is not a prerequisite for farming in this study area. Previous studies (Opera, 1997), Obibiaku, 1983; Ekong and Aduaji, 1981) showed that education had very important influence on the ability to access information and communication media. Thus the ability of a farmer to access the communication media for affective decision-making is positively related to his/her educational attainment. This study therefore concludes that the educational attainment of the respondents is low and could negatively affect their accessibility information and communication media.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Distribution of Respondents.

Age year	Kwande No. 50		Guma No 50		Ogbadigbo No 50		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Below 30	10	20.0	12	24.0	8	16.0	30	20.0
31 - 40	12	24.0	16	32.0	12	24.0	40	27.0
41 - 50	20	40.0	18	36.0	24	48.0	62	42.0
Above 50	8	16.0	4	8.0	6	12.0	18	12.0

Educational Attainment									
	formal	Kwande No 50		Guma No 50		Ogbadigbo No 50		Total	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
No		12	24.0	10	20.0	10	20.0	32	21.0
Primary education		28	56.0	24	48.0	26	52.0	78	52.0
Secondary education		8	16.0	12	24.0	14	28.0	34	23.0
Tertiary education		2	4.0	2	8.0	0	-	6	4.0

Annual Income (₦)									
	Kwande No. 50		Guma No 50		Ogbadigbo No. 50		Total		
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Less than N5000	8	16.0	5	10.0	3	6.0	16	11.0	
N5001-N10,000	10	20.0	13	26.0	16	32.0	39	26.0	
N11,001- N15,000	12	24.0	10	20.0	13	26.0	35	23.0	
N16,001- N20,000	20	40.0	15	30.0	14	28.0	49	33.0	
N20,000and above	-	-	7	14.0	4	8.0	11	7.0	

Source: Field Study, 2004

Table 2 shows that women contribute most of the labour in planting cassava, rice, soyabean and melon, while men contribute labour mainly in yam which is considered men's crop. The women are also in charge of the planting and harvesting of soyabean and melon. For instance, women contribute 65% and 95% labour in planting and harvesting of soyabean respectively and 100% labour in planting and harvesting melon. The distinction between male and female crops appeared clearly on the table.

The respondents were asked to select from the list of various options the common information and communication media used in the area.

Table 2: Male and Female labour contribution to staple crop production in the study areas (in %)

	Field Production		Planting		Weeding		Harvesting		Storage	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Yam	70	30	80	20	20	20	60	40	60	40
Cassava	40	30	20	80	40	60	40	40	40	60
Rice	70	50	65	35	10	90	45	55	10	90
Soyabean	55	45	35	65	10	90	05	95	-	100
Melon	70	30	-	100	-	100	-	100	-	100

Source: Filed Survey 2004

Table 3 shows that a common trend which prevailed in these studied area was that radio ranked first (58.0%) and followed by television (29.0%). An insignificant number (13.0%) said that newspapers were also used for communication in the area. The low rating of newspapers could be attributed to the low literacy level of the respondents in the studied area (see Table 1).

The finding, also shows that the most recent information and communication media are heavily concentrated in the urban areas of the country where there are existing infrastructure e.g (electricity) coupled with the respondent's low level of education. The study agreed with Ogbonna and Neuton (2003) who indicated that most of the farmers in rural Nigeria used television, radio and extension agents as sources of information due to their low level of education.

Table 3: Information and communication media commonly available within the study area.

	Kwande		Guma		Ogbadigbo		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Radio	30	60.0	32	64.0	25	50.0	87	58.0
Television	15	30.0	14	28.0	16	30.0	44	29.0
Newspaper	5	10.0	4	8.0	10	20.0	19	13.0
Mobile Phone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Computers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Internet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

One of the objectives of this study was to ascertain the extent of ownership of functional information and communication media among the respondents. Table 4 represents the finding. It shows that (50.0%) of the respondents owned radio, (35.0%) owned television while newspaper ranked (15.0%). Earlier report by CTA (2002) is in agreement with this finding. CTA noted that radio is now back in the limelight, not least because its place as the most dominant mass medium in developing countries has not been usurped by the new comers. CTA asserts further that current estimate put the number of radio sets owned in Africa, for example, at 200 million compared with 62 million television sets and 1 million Internet subscribers. Multiply this radio ownership figure by four or five listeners per radio, and you have vast audience, (www.3.sn.apc.org/Africa). Upandhya (1992) also reported in her study that due to low literacy levels, women farmers are not inclined to reading printed media, but largely on radio as their information source.

Table 4: Ownership of Information and Communication Media.

	KWANDE		GUMA		OGBADIGBO		TOTAL	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Radio	25	42.0	35	53.0	40	36.0	100	53.0
	25	42.0	20	34.0	25	35.0	70	37.0
	10	16.0	4	7.0	6	9.0	20	10.0

Table 5 presents the frequency of accessibility of information and communication media by the respondents. The table shows that the frequency of accessibility to information and communication media by the respondents was low. For instance, (30.0%) of all the respondents had access to radio 1-2 times a week, (46.0 %) had access to television 1 -2 times a week, while (50.0%) indicated having access to newspapers 1 – 2 times a week. In a related studies carried out by Saito and Gadzam (1996) and Antoine (2000), it was reported that access to information and communication media by rural farmers in Nigeria and Caribbean countries is advancing at a pace far slower than desired.

Table 6 presents the nature of information requirement of the respondents. According to the finding, (20.0%) of the respondents need information on supply of chemicals and input while (13.0%) said they require information on agricultural credit. The table also revealed that (7.0%) reported they need information on agricultural marketing and price. This finding agreed with the earlier study by Ozorva (1997) who indicated that small-scale farmers in Africa need information on agricultural credit, agricultural technology, marketing and extension education.

Table 5: Access to Information and Communication Media

Medium	Frequency	KWANDE		GUMA		OGBADIGBO		TOTAL	
		Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Radio	Everyday	2	8.0	4	11.0	4	10.0	12	12.0
	3-4 x a week	4	16.0	15	43.0	6	15.0	25	25.0
	1-2 x a week	10	40.0	10	29.0	12	30.0	32	30.0
	1-2 x a month	6	24.0	6	17.0	10	25.0	22	22.0
	Seldom	3	12.0	-	-	8	20.0	11	11.0
Television	Everyday	-	-	3	15.0	-	-	3	4.0
	3-4 x a week	2	8.0	5	25.0	5	20.0	12	17.0
	1-2 x a week	10	40.0	12	60.0	10	40.0	32	46.0
	1-2 x a month	8	32.0	-	-	8	32.0	7	10.0
	Seldom	5	20.0	-	-	2	8.0	-	-
Newspaper	3-4 x a week	-	-	-	-	2	33.0	2	10.0
	1-2 x a week	2	20.0	1	25.0	1	17.0	4	20.0
	1-2 x a month	5	50.0	3	75	-	-	-	-
	Seldom	3	30.0	-	-	1	17.0	4	20.0

X= Times

Table 6: nature of Information needs of Women Farmers in Benue

CATEGORY	No = 50 Kwande		No = 50 Guma		No = 50 Ogbadigbo		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agric. Credit	5	10.0	10	20.0	5	10.0	20	13.0
Agric Marketing & price	6	12.0	4	8.0	6	12.0	16	11.0
Chemical & Agric. Input	16	32.0	12	24.0	15	30.0	43	29.0
Supply of Chemicals and Supply of Input & Output	12	24.0	7	16.0	10	20.0	30	20.0
Food Processing and Preservation technology	8	16.0	10	20.0	12	24.0	30	20.0
Animal Production	3	6.0	6	12.0	2	4.0	11	7.0

Table 7 shows that high cost of information and communication medium (34.0%) was seen as the most serious constraint to access to information media by the respondents. Lack of formal education (27.0%) of the women farmers and inadequate power supply (21.3%) were noted as constraints to access to information and communication media by the farmers. Specifically, high cost of information and communication media and lack of formal education were prominent constraints in the three areas studied. However, an insignificant number (8.7%) of the respondents said that culture and tradition were also restraints to their access to information and communication media. In a related study by Rahji (1999), it was reported that culture allowed women to spend most of their time in farming and domestic activities than watching television, listening to radio and reading dailies.

Table 7: Problem associated with access to Information and Communication

PROBLEM	KWANDE %		GUMA %		OGBADIBO %		TOTAL %	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Cost	15	30	20	40	16	32	51	34
Family responsibility	5	10	4	3	5	10	14	9
Inadequate supply	10	20	12	24	10	20	32	21.3
Lack of formal education	15	30	10	20	15	30	40	27.0
Tradition/culture	5	10	4	8	4	8	13	8.7

Conclusion and Recommendation

Agricultural development programmes put special emphasis these days on the application of agricultural inputs and technologies in farming activities. Information and communication media is recognized as important tool in creating awareness on the potential of these inputs and technologies for high yield and productivity. Access to information and communication media by women farmers must therefore be thoughtfully and carefully designed.

This study provided further proof that rural women are involved in agricultural activities and are interested to learn through information and communication media. For instance 50.0% of the respondents in this study reported owning radio while 35.0% had television sets.

Access to information and communication media was low for the majority of the farmers due to high cost of information and communication among others. Respondents suggested topics on chemical and agricultural input, supply of chemical and inputs/outputs, food processing and preservation technology and so on as areas where information is required.

Since the majority if the farmers in this study are illiterate there is need to repackage and present radio and television programmes on agricultural development in local languages. Government and private organization should subsidize the cost of these information and communication media in order to make them easily accessible to the farmers as high cost was identified as one of the constraints to accessibility to information and communication media.

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