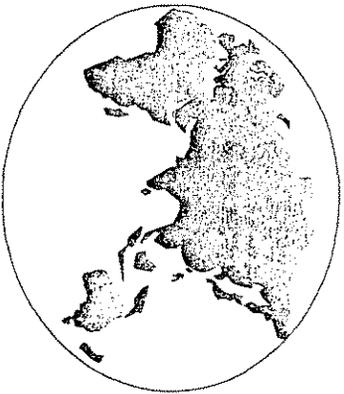


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NET-WORKING AMONG AGRICULTURAL LIBRARIES IN BENUE STATE

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Resource sharing among Libraries is a phenomenon that is widely discussed and practiced. Indeed Libraries of all sizes and locations engage in some form of resource sharing in order to survive. Resource sharing itself is a term that covers a wide range of cooperative activities such as lending, exchange, acquisition, staff, on-line information search and so on (Edoka, 1994).

According to Haravu (1994) the concept of networks is not new in the National agricultural research library systems (NARLS) of the developing world. The purpose of networks in most-cases is to promote Collaborative efforts in research and sharing of research based knowledge, skills and technology for efficient service delivery he concluded.

Network is a more or less formalized, relatively stable pattern of communication and interaction among social workers who share common concern. Such pattern emerge as a result of relation-building efforts among actors.

To successfully make available “state of the art” knowledge and information among its actors, a continuous circulation of information must occur within the Agricultural knowledge and information system (AKIS).

Studies of knowledge sharing and/or networking focus on the generation, share and use of knowledge and information among network members. These networks may be found within organizations or across organization and institutions and the basic assumption behind networking activities is that each participant holds certain clues to understanding and solving the network members problems (Edoka 1994, Minde 2000).

According to Carter (1989) an increasing amount of evidence suggests that networks of individuals and/or organizations play pivotal role in maintaining the flow

of information and sustaining innovation. Field research in Netherlands and Colombia corroborates the importance of both formal and informal network (Grooter, 1990, Engel, 1992). The evidence shows that successful networks such as Dutch horticultural study clubs exhibit high degree of member network.

As in the agricultural research system, Benue state has an elaborate albeit not very effective agricultural research information delivery system to the researchers, extension agents and farmers, the end Users (MOA, 1995). This is in the form of an extension services network stratified into several levels: the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC), the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Benue State Agricultural Rural Development Authority (BNARDA) and the Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA). Besides there are a University of Agriculture and a college of Agriculture in Makurdi and Yandev respectively.

These agricultural research systems though essential in the generation of information is not enough to realize adequate agricultural productions. Production requires more than mere generation of agricultural knowledge; it requires channel to be established through which the knowledge can flow freely into areas where it can be used effectively.

Many studies have been carried out regarding the networking process among the scientists themselves at the frontline level of research services up to the point where information is passed to the extension service (CTA 2000, Sison, 1990). The focus of this paper however is to evaluate the present status of networking process among agricultural Libraries in Benue State and make recommendation for system improvement where necessary.

This author accepts that the meaning of Library resource sharing, Library networking, and Library co-operation are nearly the same: therefore the terms are used synonymously in this work.

In reference to these terms, Kent (1989) states that Library network exist for the purpose of sharing resources: bibliographic data, functions, materials, human

and technology resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Libraries and documentation centers are seen as resources that can be tapped by researchers to satisfy their information needs or that of their colleagues in the network. Libraries are often the conduits through which certain types of information flow in the research network.

According to Sison (1990) a network is a system integrating institution Libraries, documentation centers, information centers, analysis centers into coordinated whole to provide a Community of Users with relevant input/data irrespective of its origin, format and physical location.

Duch-ense (1987) states that a network is a systematic organization of units interconnected for the purpose of achieving some goal that is more than one of the unit can achieve separately.

To Altherfion (1977), employing the network concept to support information Services is an old idea of which two examples-inter-Library loans and centralized cataloguing are forward through out the world. What is new is a wide spread growth of interest in the possibilities of improving operations by interconnecting information system and services as well as Library operation. The idea appeals because of potential for greater improve services and reducing cost.

Haravu (1994) notes that not much has been done to formally network Libraries in the National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) and International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs). The potential of a well coordinated international Library network with country, sub-country or regional sub-network provide wide and efficient access to certain types of information needed by researchers, planners, policy makers, academics, extensionists has not been fully appreciated and exploited he concluded.

Hailu (1989) further adds that the overriding reason for setting up Library and information networking is to insure the coordination of efforts and sharing of resources to better-satisfy information needs of Users in a subject areas and/or geographical region of mutual concern to network members.

Haravu (1994) lists the different kinds of databases that are possible to be developed in a Library and information networks to include the following: Union catalogue of serial holding Union catalogue of monographs including non-conventional Literature; and Union catalogue of other types of materials, such as patents and theses.

Besides Haravu (1989) states that databases of resources like: reports, policy papers and so forth produced locally by researchers, policy makers, ministries, consultants, donors and extension departments can also be developed for the network.

Minde (2000) states that networking is useful for the following reasons:-

- It shares best practice
- It avoids false start, duplication;
- It accelerates regional harmonization and rationalize of practices, standards, grades, regulations and policies leading to higher levels of efficiency within the region.
- It increases access to and use of information, innovation and experiences across countries.

METHODOLOGY

This study combined a document content analysis and structured interview within Libraries in the area of agriculture. Respondent's interviewed were staff of the following institutions; Libraries; University of Agriculture Makurdi, Benue State Agricultural and Rural Development (BNARDA) and Akparan Orshi College of Agriculture Yandev (ACAY).

Networking Among Agricultural Libraries

To identify respondents for the interview, staff list of personnel were from University of Agriculture Makurdi (UAM), BNARDA and A Libraries of these three organizations. Two methods were used to identify respondents:- (a) where the institution was willing to provide such a list obtained directly from the office concerned. (b) where a list could not be obtained in this manner, an annual report or other document that contained such a list was used. This was done in BNARDA.

Using the lists, sampling was carried out using systematic sampling (Frankfort and David, 1992) as a method that consists of selecting a Sampling Unit of the population after the first sampling unit is selected from the first "K" sampling units. These respondents were selected using the following formula:

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 K & = & \frac{N}{n} \\
 \text{Where } N & = & \text{Total Population} = 60 \\
 n & = & \text{Sample population} = 30 \\
 K & = & \text{Sampled unit} = 2 \\
 K & = & \frac{60}{30} = 2
 \end{array}$$

Consequently, 2 units interval was used to select the names of Librarians from the list of the target population.

The questions for the interview focused on

- a) The respondents communication activities
- b) The nature of network projects
- c) The institutions policies relating to network and restraints to network

The Librarian is chiefly concerned that information is created,

disseminated to where it is needed, if it is not disseminated to that point, then it is logical to create it at all.

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Awareness and Location of Colleagues N = 30

Awareness of Colleague Elsewhere	UAM	BNARDA	ACAY
Affirmative	67	33	67
Negative	33	67	33

Knowledge is embedded in people as well as in Organizations. Therefore, the establishment of Linkage is essential for knowledge to flow from the source to areas where it can be used effectively. Table I presents the level of Colleague awareness and location of the respondents. As indicated in Table I, 67% of the respondents in UAM and ACAY respectively are aware of their Colleagues elsewhere and where they are located. 33% of the respondents in BNARDA also indicated in affirmation. However, 33% of the respondents in UAM and ACAY said they are not aware of their colleague elsewhere and a significant number 67% in BNARDA indicated same.

This finding however suggests significant improvement in the respondents collegial awareness and location.

Table 2: Frequency of Collegial Communication N = 30

	UAM %	BNARDA %	ACAY %
Frequency	-	-	-
Occasionally	33	60	55
When needed	67	40	45

Table 2 suggests that frequency of Communication as indicated by the respondents is deficient. This would suggest a gap in the utilization of information

created and stored elsewhere and perhaps hinder effective research work.

The finding also implies that the respondent knowledge of their colleague and their locations (see table I) does not guarantee a high level (rate) of communication among them. (see table 2). The funding agrees with earlier work Ike (1992) who noted that communication among Nigerians Librarians is inadequate due to lack of communication facilities (telephone, E-mail, fax, internet) in most Nigerian Libraries.

Table 3: Existence of Network project

Frequency	UAM %	BNARDA %	ACAY %
Affirmative	33	-	30
Negative	52	25	60
No knowledge	15	75	10

Table 4: Nature of Network Project N 30

	UAM %	BNARDA %	ACAY %
Unions list of serial	*	*	*
Union catalogue of monograph	-	-	-
Cooperate Acquisition	-	-	-
Inter Library Loan/Exchange	100	-	100
Internet Connectivity	-	-	-

Network project and facilities are almost non-existence in the Libraries studied. As shown in table 3, an insignificant number of the respondents 33% in UAM and 30% in ACAY said that network project exist in their institutions while no evidence of such project in BNARDA.

As a follow-up, respondents were asked to indicate the nature of the network projects existing in their Libraries. Those respondents, who indicated in affirmation (see table 3) identified inter-library loan/exchange (see table 4).

This finding almost agrees with Bouazza (1986) who stated that Libraries in developing Countries hardly engage in networking and when they do engage at all, they restrict their activities to lending and exchange of materials due to administration rigidities and inadequate resources for networking activities.

Table 5: Most Demanded information sources among network members

SOURCE	UAM %	BNARDA %	ACAY %
Farm Journals	70	60	55
Colleagues	35	20	24
Agricultural Bank	-	40	60
Government Publication	60	50	54
Dallies	30	60	65
Research Reports	57	60	65
Books	45	56	60
Agricultural Exposition	40	-	-
Farmers Organization	52	46	35
Service Extension	30	20	24

Note:- % > 100 due to multiple responses

a = Service extension come from people such as Veterinary Doctors, who provide a service as well as technical advice to farmers.

Looking at table 5, the diversity of information sources demand catches the eye, even when only the top five sources in each category are included. Apparently, Users in the State have developed over a time a diverse multi-faceted communication network to enable them to obtain the information they need. Farm journals stand out. This suggests that farm journals are a "carrier wave" of sorts with a very basic role in facilitating the exchange of Agricultural information. It also suggests that by reading their journals regularly, farmers can keep ahead of relevant

developments that will affect agriculture.

Surprisingly, interpersonal communication which facilitates custom-made advice that closely fits the situation of the farmer and for his/her farm at a particular moment in time was not considered as five most important sources of information. This could be attributed to deficiency in communication among network members (see table 2).

Table 6: Rank order of Possible Constraints to Networking

S/No.	UAM	BNARDA	ACAY
1.	Unclear mandate	Unclear mandate	Unclear mandate
2.	Finance	Finance	Finance
3.	Inadequate material resources	Organizational rigidities	Under staff
4.	Excessive perceived economic risk	Inadequate material resources	Excessive perceived economic risk
5.	Under staff	Under staff	Organizational rigidities
6.	Organizational rigidities	Inadequate trained staff	Inadequate trained staff
7.	Inadequate trained staff	Poorly organized resources	Poorly organized resources
8.	Poorly organized resources	Excessive perceived economic risk	Inadequate material resources

Respondents were asked to name eight of the most possible constraints to networking among agricultural Libraries in the state. Table 5 presents the ranking of the possible constraints mentioned by the respondents based on the number of times the topic was mentioned by the location. The responses to the question were content analyzed and then categorized into the items appearing in the table.

Respondents in all the institutions mentioned unclear mandate and inadequate financial resources as major constraints to networking. Other factors named

included inadequate material resources, organizational rigidities, under staff and excessive perceived economic risk.

Apart from these, respondents also mentioned inadequate trained staff and poorly organized resources.

This finding agrees with earlier work Wenasundera (1994) who stated that inadequate financial resources, a perception of the network as benefiting only the local point of the network, a lack of true commitment to the idea of resource-sharing and slow implementation of policy decision are some of the reasons for the slow growth of network in Bangladesh.

This study seeks to examine the status of the existing agricultural Library network system in Benue State using document content analysis and structural interview concepts. The primary objectives are to evaluate the system, identify the areas to be strengthened and make recommendation. The study tends to be descriptive rather than prescriptive.

The key observations suggest that the essential elements of networking are lacking. There is no significant accomplishments in policy making, financial resources, research and education on Library network. At present, the only networking project existing is lending and exchange of resources and organizational rigidities poses a serious constraints to this singular network project.

To provide a workable network among the Libraries, the first and foremost challenge is to enhance the understanding of Library network system among policy makers which is a necessary condition for designing and implementing the network activities.

Again financing mechanism should be established and coupled with general guidelines for networking among the agricultural Libraries. An enabling environment, one with an effective legal frame work, a property right system and an enforcement mechanism, to make it mandatory for Library to abide by the terms of the network

project is necessary.

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