Information Literacy Training of Rural Famers for Enhanced Agricultural Production in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area in Imo State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

Information literacy of farmers is significant for the growth of farmers, increased farmer's income and production, promoting efficiency of agiculure and rural development. The current farmer information literacy is apparently incompatible with the demand for the min information age. The study aims at exploring the information training skill of farmers in Ohaji/Egbema of Imo State. Besides the review of relevant literature the study conducted a questionnaire – based survey of 200 farmers in twenty (20) communities of the region. The analysis of the survey shows that farmers need information for various purposes of farming activities, and they need sourcesand media to access information mostly to improve on their farming. Many of the farmers however cannot make use of the modern technique in agiculure because of their low educational level. Fund and skill to acquire and use modern technology is a problem to the rural famers. Poor accessibility to electronic information affects farmers` access to needed information. The paper recommends the provision of training program to famers to enhance their skill in farming is very vitd. It is also important for the famers to explore all media channels of communication by local and state governments to get information. Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) should be introduced by the local government authorities in local languages and to encourage their understanding and implementationof ideas and programs in the best possible way.

Key Words: Information Literacy. Farmers, Training, Information Literacy, Agricultural Productivity, Nigeria.

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the occupations in Imo State sixty-five percent.(65%) of the total population of Imo State depends on agiculture. Agriculture does not only produce food for mankind, it also supplies raw materials for industries. Government of Imo State Nigeria has introduced many program used to promote agiculure. Ohaji/Egbema Local

Government Area is one of the 27 Local government areas in Imo State having an area of 890km2 and a population of 182, 538 in the 2006 census. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. A good number of big companies, government agencies and voluntary organization have established farms in the various places of the local government. It has 26 autonomous communities.

There are various sources of agricultural information available in rural areas such as: fellow farmers, agriculture extension offices, print material such as leaflets, brochures, newspapers and books, radio, television, telephone, internet community leaders and NGOs. To make use of these information sources, a farmer needs to learn how to use and approach information centers. Information literacy increases the ability to use locate and identify information and information sources properly. According to Garner (2006), information literacy educates the user's ability to locate, recognize and evaluate it properly and get through proper information channels. It helps them get right information in right time. Information literacy lies at the core of lifelong learning, it empowers people in all walks of life to see, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social occupations and educational goals.

There are many information sources in rural areas both formal and informal information channels but the rural community does not know how to utilize it. Information literacy skills are necessary for people to be effective lifelong learners and to contribute in knowledge to the societies which is why information literacy was endorsed by UNESCOs' Information for All Programs (IFLAP, 2008) with the capacity of people to recognize their information needs, locate and evaluate the quality, store and retrieve information, make effective and ethical use of information and apply information to create and communicate knowledge. The scope of information literacy includes computer literacy, information technology literacy, internet literacy, digital literacy, media literacy and more.

Based on this, Jiaoping YU (2009) defined Farmers` Information literacy as the discovery and receiving of the needed information by farmers themselves and their ability in absorbing and utilizing the acquired information contents to satisfy their information searching objectives. This definition centers on four important issues relating to farmers, Firstly, information awareness, it refers to the sensitivity of the information of farmers. This means that farmers should know where and how to search for answers when confronted with problems. Secondly, Knowledge of Information Technology (IT) meaning that farmers should have the basic knowledge of information

technology, information systems, and the new development trend of information technology. This is the basis of farmer's information literacy. Thirdly, information capability refers to farmer's ability to access information, process information, digest the information, create and spread information. Fourthly, information ethics which is an ethical requirement for farmers when using information, dissemination and information development. This aspect of the knowledge of information literacy will help the farmers to choose the useful media information, resist unhealthy media messages and outlets as much as develop their farming skill. It is on this background that the researchers explore the importance of information literacy training for farmers in rural communities, with Ohaji/Egbema as a study for farmers in rural communities in Imo State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to explore the importance of information literacy training of farmers in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify types of information needs of farmers in Ohaji/Egbema.
2. Identify the possible sources of accessing information by famers in Ohaji/Egbema.
3. Ascertain the information literacy skill of the farmers in Ohaji/Egbema.
4. To find out major problems encountered by the farmers when accessing and using information in the community understudy.

Review of Related Literature

In this era of knowledge economy, information plays an important role in every sphere of the development process. As a new paradigm of lifelong learning, information literacy has become a subject of interest and discussion in a range of scientific and professional literature.

The concept of information literacy was first put forward by Paul Zurkowski President of Information Industry Association of the United States in 1974 who described "information literacy as the competence to use information to study information technology and mold information as solution to problems" (Akanda & Roknuzzaman,2012). Information literacy according to (John 2005) is the ability to identify information needs, seek out resources to meet those needs, and then analyzed, evaluate, synthesize, and communicate the resulting knowledge. It encompasses much more than access to and ability to use computers, the internet and associated paraphernalia. It includes an ability and willingness to understand the value of

information, to recognize entrepreneurial opportunities in the sector, to locate, evaluate, and select appropriate information sources, and to translate information into knowledge to be used productively, even strategically. Information literacy is directly related to critical thinking skills and emphasizes such activities as selection, rejection, evaluation, organization, topic definition and question definition (Connel & Franklin, 1994).

Different communication channels are useful for good information literacy and awareness programmes for farmers. Meitie and Devi (2009) observed that different channels can be used in getting to identify types of information needs of farmers in rural Manipur in India. Otto (2011) consented that, the use of communication channels or media is of great importance because the knowledge of its will provide keys for understanding and predicting outcomes communication process. It is common knowledge that the practical visual transfer of knowledge will give better understanding to farmers especially the rural farmers who are seen to be less literate. Abosede, Alabi and Oluyemisi citing Otto (2011) observed that farmers in rural areas are predominantly not lettered as reading printed media was way far from use by rural farmers from whom majority of farm produce come. Therefore it is asserted that exposure to various communication channels in farmer's local language is the best option for the farmers. The importance of farmer's information literacy training skills cannot be over-emphasized as Sokoya, Onifede and Alabi (2012) opined that interpersonal connectivity between farmers and agriculture extension agents will enhance farmer's information literacy, knowledge and awareness of current trend in farming that will boost stages of farming and abundance food supply.

Storage of farm produce is not the sole duty of farmers but other stakeholders like investors who though do not have knowledge of farming but have the scientific knowledge of storage and financial capability to buy farm produce in large quantity at the peak of harvest season. Therefore farmers need to know and plant more of such farm produce that investors are yearning for and be able to link the investors through different media; such media expressed the strategic ways of marketing farm produce after harvesting (Oladeji, 2011). With the knowledge of information literacy skill farmers can get needed information through different channels; mainly through agricultural extension services, mass media, folk tales, social networking and interpersonal relationship with fellow farmers and relations. Ogungbeni, Ogunbo & Adeleke (2013) carried out a research on the farmers information needs and revealed that, illiteracy, lack of financial, support, inadequate transport facility lack of rural electrification, nonchalant of government towards farmers needs, etc are some of the problems that

hinder rural farmers to access agricultural information properly. Mwalukasa (2013) revealed in his study that most farmers received their agricultural information through mediated and professional inter-personal methods. Major reliable channels of disseminating agricultural information for climate change adaptation were neighbors and fellow farmers, radio and extensions workers. The knowledge of the application of modern information technology such as internet, discussion groups, chat groups, e-mail, face book, twitter, blogs etc, as new channels of communication that could improve farmer's orientation towards the economic growth of the nation. The subsistence farmers who are predominantly illiterate could be trained on how they could apply these new mechanized channels to increase their production output.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research method. The population of the study was 200 farmers which were drawn from the 26 communities that made up the Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. The copies of the questionnaires were distributed with the help of the community leaders to those farmers who can read and write. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistic of frequency distribution mean.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One: What types of information do farmers in Ohajij/Egbema need?

Table 1: Type sof Information Needs of the Farmers

Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean
I need information on price of commodities	240	255	70	20	585	2.9
On pesticides	360	330	-	-	690	3.5
On training programmes for farmers	180	180	150	20	430	2.1
About fertilizers	388	309	-	-	697	3.5
About planting seeds	284	267	46	17	614	3.6
On weather forecasting	60	255	150	25	490	2.5
On harvesting	52	99	240	34	452	2.1
On storage	300	278	56	4	638	3.2

The result on Table1 shows that majority of the respondents need information on fertilizers and pesticides and their mean scores are 3.5 each. It can also be deduced that great number of farmers in Ohaji/Egbema needed information on how to store their farm produce, on government packages, subsidies and on planting seeds as their mean scores are 3.2 and 3.1 respectively. Information on harvesting and training programme has low response with mean score of 2.1 each. This finding affirms the position of Oladeji (2011) where he stresses that farmers need information that will help them increase their farm produce.

Research Question Two: What are your sources of information?

Table 2: Sources of Information Used by the Farmers

Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean %
Television	120	345	110	-	575	2.9
Radio	392	285	10	2	679	3.4
Newspaper	180	165	160	20	425	2.1
Cell phone	196	171	126	31	524	2.6
Agric extension staff	132	141	170	35	378	1.9
Fellow farmers	388	309	-	-	697	3.5
Community leaders	292	210	114	-	616	3.1
Government officials	156	183	140	30	269	1.3
Markets	356	306	18	-	680	3.4
Village meetings	276	297	54	5	632	3.2

The findings of this study in respect of research question two revealed that greater number of the respondents sourced their information mostly from fellow farmers, radio, markets, village meetings and community leaders as their mean scores ranges from 3.5 to 3.1 respectively. Other sources of information by the farmers from the table are television and cell phone as their mean score are 2.9and2.6 respectively. The findings also revealed that governments officials, agric extension staff and newspapers were not good sources of information to farmers in Ohaji/Egbema as their score, are 1.3, 1.9 and 2.1 which are far below the average mean score 2.5. These finding corroborates with the idea of Mwalukasa (2013) where he posits that most farmers received their agricultural information through neighbors, fellow farmers, radio and extension workers.

Research Question Three: How skillful are you in sourcing information?

Table 3: Information Literacy Skills of the Farmers

Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean %
I can read information on print manuals	121	217	148	-	579	2.9
I know how to find information on internet	60	135	190	35	420	2.1
I know how to send and receive email messages	-	99	240	47	386	1.9
I know how to use facebook	44	111	210	47	412	2.1
I can flow very well on group discussion on time	48	129	200	45	422	2.1
I can send message through whatsapp	56	120	210	41	427	2.1
I can make and receive calls	240	267	66	18	591	2.9

Analysis of data on Table 3 shows that few numbers of the respondents can read and write and, also can make and receive calls as their means scores are 2.9 each. The findings also revealed that the respondents were not conversant with the new channels of information communication as their mean scores range from 1.9 to 2.1 below the accepted average of 2.5 indicating that the information literacy skills of the respondents were very how, which is why Mwalukasa (2013) advocates for the training of the illiterate farmers on this new mechanized channels of communication which will help them to increase their production output.

Research Question Four: What are the problems encountered by farmers in accessing information?

Table 3: Problems Encountered in Accessing Information.

Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean %
My low level of education affects my access to information and usage	280	285	40	15	620	3.1
Epileptic power supply affects my access to information	240	255	70	20	585	2.9
Inability to access the right information affects my information usage	60	255	150	150	490	2.5
Lack of government concern towards rural farmers	300	278	56	56	638	3.2

Problems militating against the respondents` access to information and usage was majorly on lack of the government`s concern towards rural farmers with 3.2 mean score followed by low educational level of the farmers, 3.1; epileptic power supply, 2.9; while inability to access the right information was the least problem with 2.5 mean score. This finding agrees with the opinion of Otto(2011)who observed that farmers in rural areas are predominantly not lettered as reading printed media was away far from use by them, therefore advocates for exposure or training to various communication channels in the farmers` local language.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that farmers` in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area need information, on how best to package their products, store the products, harvest the products etc; In respect of the finding, there is need to make available needed information on how best that the farmers can package their products. This could be done by teaching them through organizing symposiums, and village square talks to the farmers. The finding equally showed that the farmers are not skillful, based on this finding it was deduced that that farmers in Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State do not have the information literacy skill to access their information needs, from the new mechanized channels of communication. The famers can improve on their skill in farming when they are introduced to the farming skills and how useful it will be in their farming business. Farming products has gone online and the farmers can be introduced to the new farming technique and mechanism. It is very important to note that information literacy training is urgently needed by these farmers to bridge this gap on information access and usage. Having carried out this research on this Local Government Area, it is important to reach out to the farmers in this area. The public library which is the library for the grass root should introduce information literacy programme for the farmers in this area, train them on how they can improve on their farming business, packaging, preservation and storage. In conclusion it is obvious that with information literacy training their production output will be increased, adequately packaged and stored.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the research findings.

All media channels of communication should be explored by the state and local government to create awareness in farmers` local language to encourage understanding and implementation of ideas and programs in the best way possible. There should be ways of identifying the best approach that farmers can use to access information needed

to improve on their farming. The government especially the grass root government should devise means of assisting the farmers in sourcing and seeking necessary information to enhance their farming. Since most farmers are illiterate, adult education could be organized for them to boost their knowledge to be able to read and write and also know how to address their information needs through other means of communication. A well equipped farm community hall should be created by the local government where farmers could meet occasionally and be address on their farming information needs.

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