

COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES USED BY EXTENSION WORKERS IN DISSEMINATING AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION TO FARMERS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

The study examined communication techniques used by extension agents in disseminating agricultural information to farmers in Anambra state. The study is a survey research, three research questions guided the study, 80 extension workers were randomly selected from the four agricultural zones in Anambra state. Questionnaire which was validated by two experts in Agricultural Extension was used to collect information from the 80 extension agencies. The results of the study revealed that the most communication techniques used by extension agents in disseminating information include posters, Home visits, farm visits, phone calls, group demonstration, method demonstration and leaflets. Constraints to the use of modern communications, techniques include poverty, high cost, lack of access to modern technologies, illiteracy of farmers, poor network services etc. Strategies for improving the use of modern communication techniques amongst others include in-service training for extension agents, workshop/seminars for farmers on the use of modern communication techniques. Based on the findings some useful recommendations were made.

Key words: communication technique, Agricultural information, farmers.

Introduction

Information dissemination to farmers is critical in achieving food security in any nation without which a vacuum is created for farmers in adopting new agricultural innovations. Agricultural information refers to all published and unpublished knowledge

on general aspects of agriculture and consists of innovations, ideas and technologies of agricultural practice (Aina, 1990). Agricultural information is needed for overall development of agriculture. The objectives of transformation agenda can hardly be realized when farmers have no access to information. The aim of research and extension in Nigeria is to help farmers

increase their agricultural productivity and to facilitate income generation, developments adoption and evaluation of appropriate agriculture technologies. Agricultural extension has always been considered as the prime vehicle for bringing technological innovations of farmers for sustainable development and improved quality of life.

The ultimate goal of agric extension is to make agricultural information available or accessible to farmers who need it. Agricultural information is one of the essential resources in farm production which is not given reasonable recognition in farm planning and operation (Olawoye, 1996).

Uwe (2002) stated that agricultural extension transfers appropriate technologies and production recommendation to the clientele taking into cognizance the interest of the farmer, policy makers, private organization and the general public. To achieve this, extension workers employ the use of communication techniques which are devices used in passing information from the trainer to the learner (Oladosu 2003). Ani (2007) classified these techniques into

- a. Individual methods like home and farm visits, phone calls etc.
- b. Group methods such as demonstrations, meetings etc.
- c. Mass media which include print and electronic media.

One of the fundamental roles of an agricultural extension worker is to provide farmers with the useful information on agricultural technologies, improved practices and ensure that they build up capacities vis-à-vis a variety of available communication

techniques and above all train them in different programmes. Agbamu (2011) holds that this can be actualized through education and communication. According to Onwubuya (2011) the success and failure of extension work depends on how the extension workers approach farmers and how much they are able to affect their actions.

Adequate information is a key requirement for increased productivity and increased income which will ultimately lead to poverty reduction. The role of extension services is to give adequate, specific and unbiased technical and management information in direct response to the needs of their clients (farmers). Opara (2008) argued that extension services seem not to be effective and efficient in conveying agricultural information. Farmers do not adopt on improved technique because they have not heard or did not know anything about the practice, may be because they are not adequately informed to enhance rapid technology adoption. Poor infrastructures in the rural areas where the majority of the farmers reside also constitute a problem to agricultural information accessibility, inadequate information on agricultural technologies is a leading reason to poor patronage and adoption by farmers leading to poor agricultural productivity. Acquisition, allocation, co-ordination, utilization of farm resources may be influenced by the nature and adequacy of information in the farming communities. It becomes necessary to find out the techniques adopted by extension workers in disseminating information to the farmers with particular reference to Anambra state.

The purpose of this study is to find out the communication techniques used by extension workers in disseminating agricultural information to farmers. Specifically the study determined:

1. The methods adopted by extension agents to pass information to farmers.
2. Constraints to the use of modern communication techniques
3. The strategies for improving the use of modern communication techniques.

Research Questions

The following research question were posed to guide the study

1. What are the methods adopted by extension agents to pass farm information to farmers?
2. What are the constraints to the use of modern communication techniques?
3. What are the strategies for improving the use of modern communication techniques?

Method

The study was carried out in Anambra state. Anambra state is divided into four

agricultural zone namely: Awka, Onitsha, Nnewi, Aguata (source: ministry of Agriculture Awka 2014) 20 extension workers were randomly selected from each zone making a total of 80 extension agents which was used for the study. Data was collected using questionnaire while data collected was analyzed using frequency and mean. Norminal value were assigned to scaling items thus Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 Agree (A) = 3, Disagree = 2 and strongly disagree (SD) = 1. These values of scales were summed up and divided by four to get a mean of 2.50. Any item with a mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as Agreed while a mean less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed.

Results

The results of the study were presented as follows

Research Question 1: What are the methods used by extension agents to pass farm information to farmers.

Table 1: Mean Responses of respondents on methods techniques used to disseminate Agricultural information.

S/N	Techniques	SA	A	D	SD	N	X	Decision
1	Posters	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Strongly Agree
2.	Internet	0	0	14	66	80	1.18	Disagree
3.	Home visit	55	25	-	-	80	3.68	Agree
4.	Farm visit	62	18	-	-	80	3.76	Agree
5	Phone calls	40	40	-	-	80	3.5	Agree
6.	Personal letters	-	-	35	45	80	1.44	Agree
7.	Field days	-	-	12	68	80	1.45	Agree
8.	Group meetings	71	9	-	-	80	3.89	Agree
9.	Radio	78	2	-	-	80	3.89	Agree

10.	Television	-	-	40	40	80	1.5	Disagree
11.	Film and video	-	-	38	42	80	2.43	Disagree
12.	Leaflets	30	50	-	-	80	3.38	Agree
13.	News paper	-	-	35	45	80	1.44	Disagree
14.	Field trip	-	-	-	80	80	1.00	Disagree
15.	Electronic mail	-	-	67	13	80	1.84	Disagree
16.	Group demonstration	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Agree
17.	Method demonstration	40	40	-	-	80	3.5	Agree
18.	Journal/magazines	2	2	32	44	80	1.53	Disagree
Grand mean							3.37	Agree

Table 1 above showed that the most commonly used method were posters, home visit, farm visit, phone calls, group meetings, radio, leaflets, group demonstrations and method

demonstration. Others were not most often used in disseminating information. Research Question 2: What are the constraints to the use of modern communication techniques.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the constraints to the use of modern communication techniques.

S/N	Constraints	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{x}	Decision
1.	Poverty	60	20	-	-	80	3.75	Agree
2.	High cost of modern communication technique	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Agree
3.	Lack of access to modern communication techniques	70	10	-	-	80	3.88	Agree
4.	illiteracy of the farmers	77	3	-	-	80	3.96	Agree
5.	Poor network services	40	40	-	-	80	3.5	Agree
6.	Limited power supply	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Agree
7.	Lack of skill among extension agents	40	30	5	5	80	3.31	Agree
8.	Poor attitude of farmers towards modern communication method	30	50	-	-	80	3.38	Agree
9.	Complexity of use	55	25	-	-	80	3.68	Agree
10.	Negative attitude of extension agents towards modern communication	68	12	-	-	80	3.85	Agree
Grand mean							3.73	Agreed

All the items in Table 2 had mean values above cut-off point of 2.50 and were agreed by the respondents as constraints to the use of modern communication techniques.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies for improving the use of modern communication technique.

Table 3: Mean Response of Respondents on the strategies for improving the use of modern communication technique.

S/N	Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	N	\bar{x}	Decision
1	In-service training for extension agents on the use of modern communication technique	75	5	-	-	80	3.94	Agree
2.	Workshop/seminars for farmers on the use of modern communication technique	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Agree
3.	Government to supply some of the modern communication techniques to extension agents	80	-	-	-	80	4.00	Agree
4.	Provision of agricultural information centres in rural areas	69	11	-	-	80	3.86	Agree
5.	Service providers to ensure expansion of network coverage to local communities	72	8	-	-	80	3.9	Agree
	Grand mean						3.94	Agree

All the items in Table 3 had mean values of 3.94, 4.00, 4.00, 3.86, 3.9 respectively. These mean values were above the cut-off point of 2.50 and were all agreed by the respondents as strategies for improving the use of modern technologies in disseminating agricultural information.

Discussion

Results of the study in table I revealed that the most commonly used techniques were posters, home visit, farm visit, phone calls, group meeting, Radio, leaflets, group demonstration and method demonstration while other were not often used. According to Opara (2008) Home visits are still the most popular techniques for communicating improved technologies to farmers by extension agents.

Table 2 revealed that the constraints to the use of modern communication techniques, includes poverty, high cost of modern communication techniques, lack of access to modern communication techniques, illiteracy of farmers, poor network services,

limited power supply, lack of skill among extension agents, poor attitude of farmers towards modern extension communication, complexity of use etc. The findings are in line with what Lawal-Adebawale (2009) who stated that poverty and illiteracy constitute major challenges to the use of modern communication techniques in agricultural extension delivery services in Nigeria. Also Arokoyo (2003) stated that the use of mobile phone in extension communication is restrained by limited network coverage.

Results in table 3 revealed that strategies that could be adopted to improve the use of modern communication techniques includes in-service training for extension agents, workshop/seminars for farmers on the use of modern communication techniques, government to supply some of modern communication technique, provision of agricultural information centres in rural area, service providers to ensure wider coverage of network to rural areas etc. This findings are in line with Haythornthwaite (2005) who stated that service provides should ensure the expansion of network coverage to local

communities. Also Qakly and Garforth (2002) stated that in-service training on the use of electronic media should be organized for extension workers.

Conclusion

Communication plays a vital role in raising the productivity of farmers. For extension workers to make effective use of any communication medium in extension message delivery, they need to have a good understanding of the communication process and also the operating procedure of such technique especially with regards to modern techniques.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following are recommended

1. In-services training for the extension agents on the use of modern communication techniques to enable them disseminate agricultural information to farmers.
2. Rural areas should be provided with network services
3. Farmers should be encouraged to use modern channels e.g mobile phones and internet to access agricultural information.

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