

NON-AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION NEEDS AND SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AMONG RURAL DWELLERS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines non-agricultural information needs and seeking behaviour among rural dwellers in Oyo State, Nigeria. This is predicated on the fact that livelihood activities in rural areas where agricultural activities predominate go beyond farming activities. Rural non-farm income generating activities offer more remunerative activities to supplement or replace agricultural income, absorb surplus labour in rural areas, help farm-based households spread risks, offer income potential during agricultural off-season and provide a means to cope or survive when farming fails. Due to the importance of information in the production system, the changing information environment calls for meeting the need of information users.

The study was carried out in Oyo State in the South Western Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. From 33 Local Government Areas, three were selected for the study because they are classified as highly rural (NPC, 2007). From the Local Government Area, 3, 4, and 5 villages were selected from Ibarapa, Iwajowa and Orire, respectively. Ten households were randomly selected from each village to make a total of 120 for the study. Data were collected from the respondents sampled for the study using interview schedule. The results show that majority are males belonging to 40-49 years age group, married, Christians, without formal education and have a family size of between 10-14 members (56.7). Prominent sources of information among rural dwellers are neighbours/friends, job colleagues, Radio, Television and commercial agents. Prominent activities for which information is needed are petty trading, grinding of products, dress making, carpentry and leather work. The types of information needed are knowledge/skill information, equipment information and marketing information. The study concludes by advocating that the extension messages should be expanded to cover the non-agricultural income generating activities in order to enhance the livelihoods of people engaged in it.

Introduction

African economy is agriculture dependent and this practice dominates the rural landscape of the entire continent. Many times agricultural development is often assumed to mean rural development due to a misconception. As agriculture is the principal occupation for people in rural areas, a broader view had emerged which distinguishes rural development from

agricultural development. Rural development is equated with changes in social and economic structures, institution, relationships and processes. This means that rural development is not agricultural and economic growth alone but as the creation and fair sharing of social and economic benefits resulting from this growth. Rural development can be defined as the process by which a set of technical, social, cultural and

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institutional measure are implemented with the aim of improving their socio-economic conditions in order to achieve harmony and balance both on regional and national levels (Ekong, 2003).

Rural dwellers are engaged in farming, however, occupations in the rural areas are not all farm-oriented (Ekong, 2003); and they include income generating activities that are not primarily agriculture (Barret and Reardon, 2001). Other forms of occupation in the rural areas include saw milling, pottery, weaving, carving, leather work, carpentry, bicycle repairing, blacksmithing, knitting and dress making, dyeing, retail trading, barbing and hairdressing, entertainment, drinking parlour operation, teaching, bricklaying and house construction, native doctoring, transport operation and many more.

Rural non-farm income generating activities are characterised as, generally entail low capital investment and often do not use complex machines, few people are employed, and the owners are usually the proprietors or managers thereby making them very private enterprises. Their level of education may be so low that the business management, skill and knowledge of market information are all low; they usually entail low level of division of labour, and are usually regarded as part-time occupation or the job besides farming. They usually involve minimum or non-trained workers for better productivity. In most instances other workers besides the owner serve as apprentice and minimally on a regular wage basis. Each apprentice tends to graduate to a sole entrepreneur and there is no inclination towards partnership, little or no account of business cost and revenue are kept and banks are rarely used, level of production is often geared towards meeting the immediate needs of the local community or surrounding villages (Ekong, 2003).

Rural non-farm income generating activities may offer more remunerative activities to supplement or replace agricultural income, absorb surplus labour in rural areas, help farm-

based households spread risks, offer income potential during agricultural off-season and provide a means to cope or survive when farming fails (Lanjouw, 1999). Participation in non-agricultural sector allows poor people to smooth out or offset fluctuations in agricultural income that might occur on a seasonal basis or as a result of unexpected events. This is specially the case where savings, credit and insurance mechanisms are not available for this purpose, as is the case in many rural areas in Africa, where the agricultural sector is dominant.

Information is recognised as an essential component of the rural development process to empower poor communities, informal development agencies, policy makers and linking and informing decision-making process at every level. The development of non-agricultural income generating activities cannot be left out in the process of rural development, and this can be achieved through the acquisition of adequate information needed by the people engaging in these activities. Lack of self-sufficiency in day-to-day work constitutes information need which is usually specific and generally time-bound, either immediate or deferred. The changing information environment calls for meeting the need of information users and that the information professionals acquire expertise to cope with the operational management of the information resources. To ensure this, there is an urgent need to understand and grasp the complex process of identifying information need which is very vital in the chain of operations from information gathering to dissemination. The effectiveness of an information system depends on the extent to which the system characteristics are in congruence with the situation of the user and on how much the potential user of the system is willing and able to make use of the services provided by the information system. Information needs are affected by a variety of factors such as: The range of information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation and other individual characteristics

of the users, the social, political, economic, legal and regulatory systems surrounding the users and the consequences of information use (Ozowa, 1995).

Yahaya (2003) defined information seeking behaviour as a strategy for gathering sufficient data to address the perceived information gap. Information gap here refers to the non-agricultural information needs of the rural dwellers or inadequacies in their knowledge of certain basic practices with particular reference to technical, marketing, social and legal information. Information seeking behaviour is as a consequence of need to satisfy some goals, in the course of information seeking; the individual may interact with people, manual information or with computer oriented information system (Ozowa 1995). Knowledge about information seeking behaviour of individual is crucial for effectively meeting their information needs and to increase their productivity.

Information must be available to the rural dwellers by utilising various channels within the reach of developmental organisations. Based on this reason, the study will therefore, address the questions of what are the non-agricultural information needs of the rural dwellers?, what are the sources of non-agricultural information of the rural dwellers and how do rural dwellers seek non-agricultural information?. The general objective of the study is to determine non-agricultural information needs and seeking behaviour among rural dwellers in Oyo State. Specifically, the study investigates non-agricultural information needs, sources of non-agricultural information and determines non-agricultural information seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in the study area. Also, significant relationships between information needs and interaction with other variables of the studies were explored.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Oyo State. Oyo State is one of the six States in the South Western Nigeria. It is located between latitude 7°8' and

9°10' North of the equator and longitude 2°10' and 4°35' East of the meridian. It covers a total land mass of 27,249 square kilometer and shares boundaries with Kwara State in the North, Osun State in the East, Ogun State in the West. The average annual rainfall is 1220mm and the mean temperature is 27°C. The population of Oyo State according to 2006 population census is 5,591,589 (National Population Commission 2007). The economy of the State is based on agriculture and the major occupation of the people is farming. They engage in other activities such as tailoring, teaching, barbing and hairdressing, carpentry, blacksmithing, and transport services operation among others.

The population of the study consists of all rural-dwellers in Oyo State. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. From 33 Local Government Areas in the State, three, namely Ibarapa North, Iwajowa and Orire were selected for the study because they are classified as highly rural (NPC, 2007). There are 150 villages in Ibarapa North but only 30 villages were selected. There are about 210 villages in Iwajowa Local Government and 40 of them were selected. In Orire local government, there are about 600 but 50 villages were selected because of their population. Ten per cent of these villages was taken into account to give three, four and five villages from Ibarapa North, Iwajowa and Orire local government, respectively. This gives a total of twelve villages. Ten households were randomly selected from each village to make a total of 120 respondents for the study. Data were collected from the respondents sampled for the study using interview schedule.

The independent variables for the study include personal characteristics such as age, sex, marital status, religion, educational level and family size. Others are sources of non-agriculture information, and factors affecting accessibility of rural dwellers to non-agriculture information. While the dependent variable, non-agriculture information seeking behaviour among rural dwellers, was measured by asking the respondent indicate the method by which they seek information from the list of methods,

Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13.1 was used to analyse the data.

Results and Discussion

Majority of the rural dwellers interviewed (59.2 per cent) are males belonging to 40-49 years age group (43.4 per cent), married (82.5

per cent), Christians (62.5 per cent) and without formal education (45.8 per cent). Majority of the respondents (56.7 per cent) have family size of between 10-14 members. This shows that large family members is still a prestige among rural dwellers as they believe that this will improve their economic status.

Table 1: Description of respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Description
Age	About 43 per cent are between 40 and 49 years
Gender	About 59 per cent males
Marital status	83 per cent married
Religion	About 63 per cent Christians
Education	About 54 per cent without formal education
Household size	57 per cent have 10 -14 members
Primary Occupation	88 per cent non-farming occupations

Table 2 indicates that neighbours /friends (100 per cent), job colleagues (100 per cent), Radio (98.3 per cent), Television (95 per cent) and commercial agents (84.2 per cent) are the prominent sources of information among rural dwellers. They obtain the information frequently from neighbours/ friends (95 per cent), job colleagues (95.8 per cent), Radio (90.8 per cent). This may be due to occasional visit of the

commercial agents to the rural areas, Few of the rural dwellers (29.2 per cent) get information from extension officers to deliver the information adequately to the rural people. Rural dwellers rarely obtain information from newspaper and bulletins as majority of them have no formal education and that they are unable to read and write.

Table 2 : Information sources among respondents

Sources of Information	Yes	No
Neighbours/ Friends	120 (100)	
Job Colleagues	120 (100)	
Radio	118 (98.3)	2 (1.7)
Television	114 (95.0)	6 (5.0)
Newspaper	6 (5.0)	109 (90.8)
Papers/ Bulletins	19 (15.8)	97 (80.8)
Extension agents	35 (29.2)	79 (65.8)
Commercial agents	101 (84.2)	12 (10.0)

Table 3 presents the rating of non-agricultural information need among respondents. Their information need was measured on a rating scale of 1 to 3 points with

high need awarded 3 points; moderate need 2 points and no need 1 point. A mean score of 2 and above was used to denote need of the non-agricultural activities and a mean score below 2

denotes non-need of information on those activities. Respondents indicate that there is high need for all the non-agricultural information stated. Most of the means recorded are 3, implying that almost 100 per cent of the respondents indicated high need for the non-agricultural information. This may be attributable to the misconception that agricultural development is rural development and the concentration of extension messages on farming activities alone as against all other areas of livelihood in the rural areas. The poor state of

rural infrastructure would have also contributed to the trend of responses obtained from the respondents. However, the need on credit management was not as high as other due to the rural banking scheme that have just been introduced. Similarly, information need on cooperative management is not that high because of the prevalence of cooperative societies in the rural areas which is also used sometimes as pressure groups on the government.

Table 3 : Non-agricultural information need among respondents

Areas of non-agricultural information need	Mean	SD
Income generating activities		
Produce processing	2.33	0.50
Saw milling	2.91	0.43
Weaving	2.91	0.43
Embroidery	2.95	0.38
Carving	2.97	0.18
Leather work	2.73	0.45
Health information		
Family planning and child development	2.97	0.27
HIV/AIDS infection	2.97	0.27
Drug/ Substance addition	2.97	0.27
Medical care	2.97	0.27
Vulnerability to STD infection	2.97	0.27
Prevention of Poliomyelitis	2.97	0.27
Health Insurance	3.00	0.00
Marketing/Economic Information		
Procedure for credit procurement	2.98	0.13
Cooperative management	2.70	0.46
Budgeting Method	3.00	0.00
Market Prices	2.97	0.18
Record Keeping	2.73	0.45
Investment	2.70	0.46
Entrepreneur ability	2.95	0.22
Social Capital Information		
Group management	2.97	0.18
Group linkages	2.91	0.28
Use of social amenities	2.73	0.44
Group Dynamics	2.98	0.13

Table 3 : (Contd.)

Educational Information		
Quality of school	2.97	0.18
Training	2.95	0.22
Adult literacy	2.95	0.22
Capacity building	2.95	0.22
Governance information		
Power structure	2.93	0.40
Decision-making Process	2.95	0.38
Latitude of freedom	2.91	0.43
Fundamental human right	2.91	0.43
Followership role	2.91	0.43
Legal information		
Dispute resolution	2.93	0.40
Agreement procedure	2.90	0.54
Boundary maintenance	2.90	0.54
Government Regulation	2.90	0.54
Crime management		
Law enforcement	2.93	0.40
Maintaining order	2.93	0.40
Social conformity	2.93	0.40
Sanction of Reward or Punishment	2.93	0.40

Table 4 shows that interacting with neighbours (98.3 per cent), consulting education officers (96.7 per cent), consulting health officers (96.7 per cent), listening to radio (96.7 per cent), community leaders (95 per cent), private service providers (95 per cent) and consulting cosmopolite neighbours (94.2 per cent) are the prominent methods of seeking non-agricultural information by rural dwellers. They rarely seek information from extension agents (33.3 per cent), this may be due to the focus on farming activities alone and the fact a high ratio of extension agent –farmers exist.

Conclusion

From the results, this paper has shown that rural dwellers have a great need for non-agricultural information as components of their livelihood. Important areas where information are sought by respondents include income

generation, health, economic, social capital, governance and legal, where specific items while information is needed include embroidery and carving, health insurance, budgeting and credit procurement procedure, group dynamics and management, quality education and training, decision-making process and dispute and conflict resolution. Information can be made available to rural dwellers through consultations with education officers, health officers, community leaders, private service providers, and interacting with neighbours as well as listening to radio.

Also conventional information sources can be improved upon to provide non-agricultural information as these are the sources prominently used by rural dwellers. There is need therefore to ensure that there is provision of information on the areas identified so that the livelihoods of the rural dwellers can be enhanced.

Table 4 : Non-agricultural information seeking methods among respondents

Information seeking methods	Yes	No
By consulting education officers	116(96.7)	04(3.3)
By consulting health officers	116(96.7)	04(3.3)
From community leaders	114(95.0)	06(5.0)
From private service providers	114(95.0)	02(1.7)
By consulting cosmopolite neighbours	113(94.2)	05(4.2)
Interacting with neighbours	118(98.3)	02(1.7)
Listening to radio	116(96.7)	04(3.3)
Visit of extension agents	69(57.5)	45(37.2)
Attendance at workshop/seminar	05(4.2)	107(89.2)
Consulting government officials	09(7.5)	107(89.2)

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