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An Investigation into the Use of Information Services by Farmers among Agricultural Research Institutes in North Central Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract: ***The use of information services by farmers is expedient to collaborate agricultural development in Nigeria. These farmers must be informed about current agricultural developments and research. This study examines the extent to which farmers in the region are provided with adequate information to enhance agricultural development. The study investigates the use of information services by registered farmers among agricultural research institutes in North Central zone of Nigeria. The survey method was used for the study and a total of 121 respondents comprising registered farmers in agricultural research institutes in the zone were used for the study. Findings from the data collected showed that majority of the registered farmers were University degree holders. The research revealed that the extent at which farmers in the zone use information services was shoddy, majority of the farmers were either not satisfied with information services provided, or shortened by irregular access and inadequate provision of some information services. The concluding part of the research gave recommendations on how farmers in the zone should be provided with adequate information to enhance their productivity, which will in-turn improve agricultural development in Nigeria.***

Keywords: Information Service, Farmers, Agricultural Research Institute, North Central Zone, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Every country in the world strives to attain food security. To be able to achieve this, agricultural production must be boosted. Akukwe (2005) stated that "one of the elements that can bring about increase in agricultural production is Agricultural Research". Srivastiva (2007) defined agricultural research as the "act of studious inquiry or examination aimed at the discovery and interpretation of new knowledge in agriculture". Looking at this definition, you can see that agricultural research is inevitable in agricultural production. Ibe (2003) stated that "agricultural research in Nigeria started with the establishment of the Moor plantation in 1899 in Ibadan". This actually shows that Nigeria's strive for agricultural development through agricultural research has come of age. Nigerian government understood the importance of research in agriculture that was why this research ventures commenced.

To ensure that agricultural researchers in Nigeria had access to various agricultural information, Ibe (2003) stated that "International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in 1974 established International Grain Legume Information Centre to inform tropical Legume workers throughout the world of developments in their field and to promote communication among them. With the provision of information services, researches can be carried out easily and the findings can also be disseminated to prospective users.

Samaha (2001) stated that "quality research in agricultural development demands the provision of better agricultural information to meet the information needs of both researchers and farmers". He further stated that "the strength of a research system is dependent upon its capacity to create, organize and use information". This is to say that the vitality of research and development in agriculture is heavily dependent upon the information services provided. Effective and appropriate information is not important to agricultural research alone but also in the utilization and application of agricultural research findings. In the research institutes, information services are the sole responsibility of the library and the extension unit. They are charged with the responsibility of disseminating information to both the researchers and the farmers. Sodje (2002) stated that "with the provision of information services in various aspects of agriculture to farmers, increased production, reduced cost in production and increased profit can be guaranteed in every year, because most agricultural findings are meant to show best ways to achieve all these". This claim is based on the fact that information services enhances accurate, speedy and excellent result in farming if put in use by farmers.

Food security in Nigeria has always been one of the top agendas of every government that comes into power. This may imply that Nigeria has not been able to meet up with food security over the years. Moreover, most of the food consumed in Nigeria are been produced in Northern part of Nigeria (Yahaya, 2004). He further stated that in the North Central zone of Nigeria, which comprises Benue, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, Kwara and Nassarawa, farmers engage in the production of rice, yams, potato, maize, cassava, guinea corn, millet, groundnut, melon and livestock like Chickens, Goats, Rams, Guinea Fowls etc. To boost agricultural production through research in this zone, Kenneth (2009) stated that "government established research institutes like Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, (NSPRI) Ilorin; National Centre for Agricultural Mechanization (NCAM), Ilorin; National Cereals Research Institute, (NCRI) Bida; National Freshwater Fisheries Research Institute, (NFFRI) New Bussa; and National Veterinary Research Institute, (NVRI) Vom". But this has not yielded positive impact as

the zone and entire Nigeria is still plunged with food insecurity. One would wonder if the Research Institutes have not been able to carry out meaningful researches that can help in boosting agricultural production. But Ozowa (2005) stated that "the greatest challenge facing agricultural research institutes is not coming out with findings to solve agricultural problems but the ability to ensure the optimum use of these research findings by farmers". Johnson (2004) also put it that "lack of adequate use of information services by farmers leaves most of the research findings unpractised, thereby stagnating progress in food security". These claims indicate that problem lies on farmers' access and use of information services provided by agricultural research institutes, and as such it becomes necessary and expedient to investigate this area.

2. Statement of the Problem

Agriculture still retains its position as a bulk walk upon whose solid foundation the economy of Nigeria is based (Adebo and Ewuola, 2006). According to Obadan (1997), "the Nigerian agriculture is still plagued with low productivity, meagre income and low savings". The Central Bank of Nigeria (1998) also observed a geometric decline in agriculture contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Most of the foods in Nigeria are produced by subsistence farmers, who are not even registered with the government. Meanwhile, the population of Nigeria is increasing at geometric rate while agricultural production is growing at arithmetic rate. This has led to a situation where food is no longer a cheap commodity.

It is a fact that government has made much effort in boosting agricultural production. Among these efforts made is the establishment of research institutes in Nigeria. The research institutes strive to determine the information needs of the farmers, conduct researches and the findings are disseminated to the farmers through their information services which involves library and extension services. According to Van Dan Ban and Hawkins (1999) "the goal of an information service is to ensure that increased agricultural production is achieved by stimulating the farmers to utilize modern and scientific technologies developed through research". Unfortunately, research institutes information services have not been able to record great success in agricultural information utilization by farmers because of some factors like level of education of the farmers language barrier, economic status of the farmers, etc (Ekumankama, 2002). To buttress Ekumankama's statement, Ozowa (2005) stated that "the greatest challenge facing agricultural research institutes is not coming out with findings to solve agricultural problems but the ability to ensure the optimum use of these research findings". In addition, Johnson (2004) identified that "lack of adequate use of information services by farmers leaves most of the research findings unpractised hereby stagnating progress in food security". Also, Pastu (2004) stated that most electronic information resources are left unused by farmers due to lack of skills to use them. He also stated that most libraries in Nigeria do not educate their users on how to utilize library resources.

With all these statements above, it could be deduced that there exist a problem in the operations of agricultural research institutes information services and this could be hanging on issues that concern the kinds of information services they provide to the farmers and the media employed in providing these services. Because when information services and the media employed in providing them are shoddy, there could be tendency to experience a negative effect on the use of these services by farmers.

This research is poised to investigating deeply into these problems and to emerge with findings that will remedy the situation on ground.

3. Research Objectives

This research work looks forward to achieving the following objectives:

a. Identify the kinds of information services provided to farmers by agricultural research institutes in North Central zone, Nigeria.
b. Know the types of media employed in providing these services.
c. Ascertain the extent to which the information services provided are used by farmers under study.
d. Know the level of satisfaction derived from the use of information services by farmers.
e. To find out the factors militating against the use of information services provided to farmers.

4. Research Methodology

The data for this research work was gathered through the use of questionnaire.

a) The population of the study was made up of 121 respondents comprising;
b) 21 registered farmers in Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, Ilorin.
c) 18 registered farmers in National Cereals Research Institute, Bida.
d) 27 registered farmers in National Freshwater Fisheries Research Institute, New Bussa.
e) 38 registered farmers in National Veterinary Research Institute, Vom.
f) 17 registered farmers in National Centre for Agricultural Mechanization.

A questionnaire was designed to solicit for relevant information regarding farmer's access to information services in the mentioned research institutes.

5. Information Services Provided to Farmers by Agricultural Research Institutes

As stated by Agbamu (2000) "agricultural research institutes are established to conduct research in the field of agriculture for the purpose of agricultural production development". For research to be conducted appropriately there is need for a library which will provide the needed information. Also for the findings of the research to get to the users the library and extension services are also needed. Aina (2002) who put it that "there is hardly any agricultural research institute that does not provide library and extension services to farmers". To ensure that the farmers absolutely access these pieces of information, Ofuoku (2008) noted that "the libraries of

agricultural research institutes provide information services like inter-library reference and loan services, current awareness services, translation services, abstracting and indexing services, user education, question and answer services to farmers. etc". These services are performed in the following ways;

6. Media Employed In Providing Information Services To Farmers

According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary "a medium is a means by which something is expressed or communicated". After carrying out research and coming out with findings, the next thing is to communicate the findings to the users and this must be done using print or non-print media.

Print medium comprises any information material that is recorded in paper form and the non-print medium includes those that have audio and visual abilities mostly with the aid of electronic hardware components". Examples of the print medium include books, journals, technical reports, newsletters, bulletins, indexes and abstracts, bibliographies, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, etc. while the non-print medium carry the same information but are in slides, film strips, CD's and DVDs, Flash which are accessed with the aid of their various hardware components. The internet, broadcasting networks are also part of a non-print medium of agricultural information dissemination to farmers.

More so, farmers are also reached through seminars, workshops and training programmes. The librarians in research institutes majorly use journals, newsletters, bulletins, abstracts, slides, CDS, the internet, etc, to disseminate whatever findings that the research officers have come out with while the extension officers meet with the farmers in their localities to inform, train the farmers of the latest technologies Lamido, (2005).The extension officers use all forms of media to disseminate the information to the farmers so that the farmers can adopt the technologies.

7. Use of Information Services by Farmers

The final role of information services in agricultural research institutes is to disseminate information to the end users who are the farmers. These services are mainly carried out by libraries and extension units of agricultural research institutes. The farmers may decide to use or not to make use of the information services provided to them. Use of agricultural information services according to Oti (2002) "entails seeking and operating with agricultural information services provided". Also, Ozowa (2005) stated that "the greatest challenge facing agricultural research institutes is not coming out with findings to solve agricultural problems but the ability to ensure the optimum use of these research findings by farmers". Newsletter carrying information on the use of organic substance in the control of pest in food will only be said to have been used if the farmers after harvesting their crops seek information on the control of pest in food and apply it in reality.

Oduagwu (2001) stated that "the aim of library and extension services is to solve a problem by means of providing the needed information to the target users".

According to Lambas (2003) "use of agricultural information services can bring about positive changes in production level of farmers profit, production cost and postharvest losses". This assertion is owing to the fact that all the necessary information that has to do with boosting agricultural production, maximizing profit, reducing production cost and avoiding great losses of farm produce after harvesting are uncovered by various information services provided to farmers by agricultural research institutes. The Chinese Agricultural Research Council (2005) stated that "since the introduction of the radio farm forum, there has been a tremendous increase in agricultural production in China because many farmers keyed into the programme". This programme must have encouraged the farmers to listen and discuss about various innovations in agriculture and also act on them. More also, Centre for Agricultural Research Zambia (2003) also stated that "through question and answer services, most farmers have testified getting things right in their farms during cultivation period. Making use of these information services keeps farmers informed and in track to the easiest, latest and better ways of applying farm practices". This is because once these services are available and are open to access, farmers can at any time request for any information they desire.

8. Factors that Militate Against the Use of Information Services

Information service provides farmers with information on latest innovation/technology in farming. But there are some factors that affect the use of information services. They are:

Lack of skills to use electronic information resource: Electronic information resources are the latest means of generating, recording and disseminating information in every field of study. Agbamu (2001) stated that "there is hardly any agricultural information that is not electronically bound presently". This shows that whatever information farmers require could be disseminated and received electronically. On the other hand, Pastu (2004) stated that "most electronic information resources are left unused by farmers due to lack of skills to use them". He also stated that most libraries in Nigeria do not educate their users on how to utilize library resources. It is not just having electronic information resources but the use matters a lot. When farmers remain unskilled in manipulating these resources, it brings a setback in the use.

Irregular or Inadequate access to information services when requested by farmers: It is a fact that agricultural research institutes provide information services to farmers but most times farmers do not have access to some of these services when in need. Ozegbe (2001) claimed that "most farmers are been turned down when they ask for translation services to their local dialects". He said that the reason is sometimes because libraries of these research institutes find it difficult to engage the required manpower to carry out this function due to level of diversity in languages and also funding. According to Manubo (2005)"the inability of

agricultural research institutes information services to subscribing to some online services which opens up various sources of agricultural information denies farmers' access to such sources when they are in need of them". All these portend negatively to the use of agricultural information services of agricultural research institutes.

Language Barrier: Most agricultural information are recorded and disseminated in English language. In cases were an extension agent gets someone to interpret, there may be misinterpretation, which may send wrong message to the farmers. More so, there are numerous dialects in Nigeria, getting translators to translate information resources that will cover great number of dialects will be very cumbersome, time consuming and costly. Since a large number of Nigerian farmers are illiterates and unregistered with the government, it becomes difficult for them to make use of information services due to barrier in language communication. This is why Olaifa (2014) opined that "if textbooks, operational manuals, government publications etc are written in native languages and documented in the library for use, it will go a long way in ensuring development in all facets of life."

Lack of zeal to seeking information: Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defined the term zeal as "the eagerness, enthusiasm put in to achieve something". The willingness and information seeking behaviour of farmers has a lot to do with the use of agricultural information services provided by agricultural research institutes. Nwosu (2001) stated that "use of information services depends on the zeal in the prospective user". It is not just knowing the importance of the services or being aware of the services but the level at which a prospective user becomes zealous to seek information prompts effective use of information services provided.

Agbamu (2001) "in a survey on the information seeking behaviour of farmers in Akoko Edo Local Government Area of Edo State discovered that most farmers do not even have the zeal to seek agricultural information due to a hold tight on traditional pattern of practice". Wherever this habit is eminent, the use of information services is limited.

Nearness of Agricultural Research Institutions to Farmers Community: According to Oliya (2006) "the readiness to make use of information services is in most farmers but the distance to locations of agricultural research institutes from theirs discourages them most times". Also, Agricultural research institutes wish to extend their extension services to all communities but distance is also a problem. For instance, a livestock farmer may see it as a very long distance travelling to Plateau from Niger State to seek information from National Veterinary Research Institute, Vom. Also, the research institutes may not be able to spread its extension agents to Niger State because of distance.

Level of Education: Agbamu (2000) stated that "level of education of farmers affects their zeal to seeking information". Formal education enables the farmer to obtain useful information bulletins, agricultural newsletters and other resources. Formal education usually, aids farmers and leads them to accept new farm technologies more readily to enhance their income than those farmers without a formal education. In developing countries, a general characteristic of farmers is that they are tradition bound. They are understandably afraid of costly risk and will not take them until they are convinced that the new methods are safe, will pay and will not violate their values.

Inadequate Contact with Extension Agents: It is the view of Okpara (2001) that "local farmers are gingered to utilize agricultural information disseminated to them when they have extension agents around." He argued that it is possible that many farmers do not adopt an improved technique because they have not heard or did not know anything about the practice. An efficient extension service is a means of getting such information to the farmers. Many studies in the developing countries have identified agricultural extension agents as the most important source of information to farmers on agricultural innovations.

The more credibility an agricultural extension worker possesses in the eyes of his clientele while selling new ideas to them, the more will his clientele tend to accept his advice, suggestion and guidance. But to his dismay, Ekong (2003) found out that "farmers in Sapele Local Government Area of Delta State do not have sufficient contact with extension agents". Where this situation lingers the use of information services cannot be optimal and the result will negatively affect agricultural production as farmers will not be able to actually in demonstration know how to apply latest technologies discovered out of research.

9. Result and Discussion

Table 1: Response Rate

Institute	*No. Distributed*	*No. Responded*
NSPRI	26	21
NCRI	24	18
NFFRI	35	27
NVRI	41	38
NCAM	19	17
TOTAL	145	121

The above table indicates that out of 145 copies of questionnaire distributed, 121 copies were received from the registered farmers. A balance of 24 copies of questionnaire was not returned. Thus, we have 83.45% response rate.

Table 2: Farmer's State of Origin

States	*No. of farmers*	*Percentage*
Kwara	28	23.14%
Plateau	30	24.79%
Niger	28	23.14%
Benue	10	8.26%
Kogi	8	6.61%
Nassarawa	2	1.65%
Osun	2	1.65%
Ondo	2	1.65%
Kaduna	2	1.65%
Imo	2	1.65%
Delta	1	0.83%
Adamawa	2	1.65%
Borno	1	0.83%
Edo	3	2.48%
Total	121	100%

Table 2 shows that 24.79% of the registered farmers in the north central zone are of Plateau origin. Kwara and Niger states both has 28 (23.14%) registered farmers while Benue had 10 (8.27%). Delta and Borno states both recorded the lowest number with 1(0.83%) respectively. This shows that over half of the total numbers of registered farmers in the zone are from Kwara, Plateau and Niger states. This could actually be because all the agricultural research institutes in the zone are located in these three states.

Table 3: Educational Status of Farmers

Highest Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
PhD	0	0%
Masters	25	20.66%
B.Sc.	50	41.32%
HND	20	16.53%
OND	15	12.39%
SSCE	10	8.27%
FSLC	1	0.83%
Total	121	100 %

The response in Table 3 shows that a large percentage of the farmers (41.32%) are B.Sc. holders. 20.66% has Masters Degree, 16.53% had HND, 12.39% had OND, 8.27% had SSCE, 0.83% with FSLC and none had PhD. This indicates that registered farmers among agricultural research institutes in North Central zone of Nigeria are highly educated. The record of highly educated registered farmers could be because the libraries are research libraries of which most uneducated farmers may not be aware that they can have access to their services. The result also calls for a need for an investigation on the criteria or requirements for registering as a farmer in the Research institutions.

Table 4: Farmers Access to Library and Extension Services of Agricultural Research Institutes.

Access Allowed	No. of Respondents (Registered Farmers)	Percentage
Yes	118	97.5%
No	3	2.5%
Total	121	100%

A 97.5% Yes response by the registered farmers as shown in Table 4 above indicates that information services of agricultural research institutes accommodate farmers and are willing to help them increase their production through information provision.

Table 5: Types of Print and Non-Print Information Resources Sourced

Types of Media	No. of Respondents (Registered Farmers)	Percentage
Journals	39	32.2%
Newsletters	4	3.3%
Bulletins	14	11.6%
Leaflets	1	0.8%
Manuals	19	15.7%
Cds	3	2.5%
Internet	41	33.9%
Total	121	100%

The response from Table 5 indicates that registered farmers in the North central zone use more of Internet and Journals as the main sources of information. This agrees with Krubu & Osawaru (2011) that there is remarkable increase in the use of ICT in Nigerian Libraries. However, it is important to note that over 80% of the said registered farmers are educated. This may account for the high usage of Internet and Journals.

Table 6: Extent of Use of Information Services by Farmers

Extent of Use	No. of Respondents (farmers)	Percentage
Once a week	2	1.7%
Once a month	6	5.0%
Once in 3months	13	10.7%
Once in 6months	47	38.8%
Once in a year	53	43.8%
Total	121	100%

Table 6 clearly shows that registered farmers do not use the library frequently. Majority of the farmers either use the research library once in a year or once in six months. This result puts right Ozowa (2005) who claimed that “the greatest challenge facing agricultural research institutes is not coming out with findings to solve agricultural problems but the ability to ensure the optimum use of these findings by farmers”. This is an indication that use of information services of farmers among research institutes is shoddy. This situation can be as a result of some factors that tend to inhibit farmers use of information services

Table 7: Level of Satisfaction Derived by Farmers

Level of Satisfaction	No. of Respondents (farmers)	Percentage
Satisfied	28	23.1%
Moderate	49	40.5%
Unsatisfied	44	36.4%
Total	121	100%

Satisfaction entails fulfilment of a need, desire etc. Table 7 shows that 49 (40.5%) of the farmers level of satisfaction was moderate, while 28 (23.1%) were satisfied. It is when an expected end is met that one can say there is satisfaction. 44 (36.4%) of the farmers were unsatisfied probably because their expectations were not fully met and this could be as a result of impeding factors in the use of information services.

Table 8: Factors Militating Farmers Use of Information Services

Factors	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Language Barrier	1	0.83%
Lack of zeal by farmers	35	28.93%
Lack of skills to use electronic information resources	18	14.88%
Level of education	1	0.83%
Irregular access to some information services	61	50.41%
Distances between location of research institutes, liason offices and farmers community	2	1.65%
Lack of contact with extension agents	3	2.48%
Total	121	100%

In Table 8, it was clearly displayed that language barrier, level of education and the distance between location of

research institutes, liaison offices and farmers community were not the major factors militating the use of information services of agricultural research institutes by farmers. This could be because majority of the farmers are highly educated and are closer to the location of the research institutes. Also, 35(28.93%) of the farmers responded that the lack of zeal to seek information services was the militating factor. This affirms the claim by Nwosu (2000) that the use of information services depends on the zeal in the prospective user. 18(14.88%) of the respondents claimed that the lack of skills to use electronic information resources was the militating factor, while 61(50.41%) responded that it was irregular access to some information services. It could be deduced that the greatest factors militating against the use of information services by farmers among agricultural research institutes were the lack of zeal by the farmers, skills to use electronic information resources, and irregularity in accessibility of some information services. This situation could arise as a result of inefficiency in the part of the agricultural research institutes information services on making all effort to satisfy farmer's information request regularly and their inability to initiate training programmes on the use of electronic information resources.

10. Conclusion

It was discovered that library and extension services were provided with the exception of "open access" and print and non-print media were used to facilitate these services. With the use of print and non-print media in disseminating information to farmers it could be deduced that these farmers have more opportunity to access information services provided as they can lay hands on information disseminated through print and non-print information materials. On the other hand, the absence of "open access" denies them of wider range of information that "open access" permits.

It was discovered that the extent to which farmers used information services provided was shoddy and majority of the farmers were not satisfied with the services provided. This shows that farmers are still tied to their traditional ways of farming and their expectations were not met. Impeding factors in the course of the use of these services could account for this.

Findings showed that lack of zeal by farmers, lack of skills to use electronic information resources, irregular access and lack of provision of some information services and lack of contact with extension agents were the factors that militated against the use of information services provided. Looking clearly that the shoddy use of information services and the unsatisfaction derived by farmers was caused by these militating factors. All these militating factors have arisen as a result of inefficient information service delivery by the research institutes to farmers. This is because these are issues that bother on the job area of the research institutes, that is, as they hold the mandate to conduct research they are as well suppose to make sure that these researches are put to use by farmers by applying all strategies to encourage the use of information services by farmers.

11. Recommendations

From the analysis of the data collected for this study, the researcher can claim that the objectives of this study have been achieved since the study identified all the problems it set to investigate. Thus, the following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

It was identified that farmers among agricultural research institutes in North Central zone lacked skills to use electronic information resources. The farmers should be educated on how to use electronic information resources and any other information resources used in providing information services to the farmers. This will go a long way in encouraging the farmers to use electronic information resources and also exposing them to wider access to agricultural information that will help them in their production.

Regular access to all information services and provision of other information services that can help in disseminating information services should be ensured. These build the confidence of farmers on information service provided and also igniting them to seek information services.

More extension agents should be involved in disseminating information to farmers. This is because extension agents most of the times demonstrate research findings physically in the farmers' farms. This also will make farmers believe in the findings of research disseminated to them and also increase their zeal to using information services.

Awareness programmes on the need to use information services in agriculture should be conduct for the farmers. This is actually because most of the farmers may not be aware of information services provided and the benefits of using information services. With such programmes, more farmers will be aware of information services of the agricultural research institutes and this will go a long way in encouraging use of information services by farmers and thereby boosting agricultural production.

There should be constant evaluation of farmers' level of satisfaction on the information services provided. This will in turn enable the agricultural research institutes to ascertain farmers' satisfaction level on various services provided and also search for means of satisfying the farmers where necessary.

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