



Indigenous Communication Media Forms for the Dissemination of Agricultural Information to Rural Farmers in Otuocha, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines the use of indigenous communication media forms for the dissemination of agricultural information to rural farmers in Otuocha, Anambra State. The rationale behind the study are to find out the extent to which farmers in Otuocha access agricultural information through indigenous media of communication and the kind of agricultural information they access. Pegged on development media theory, the paper adopts qualitative research technique and uses the questionnaire to gather data from 100 farmers purposively drawn from Otuocha community. Findings of the study reveal that farmers in Otuocha access agricultural information mainly through the indigenous media forms and that the kind of agricultural information they access include those on how to improve farm methods, improved crop species, storage methods and facilities, among others. The study concludes that the indigenous communication systems are very useful in disseminating agricultural and other information to rural farmers and recommends the use of these media forms in disseminating messages intended for rural farmers in Anambra State.

Key words: Otuocha, Farmers, Indigenous, Communication, Media, Forms, Dissemination, Agricultural information

Introduction

Information has become a basic necessity of everyday life in almost all societies of the world. Human beings require information for anything and everything. Kemp, cited in Bachhav (2012), opines that information has been described as the fifth need of man; ranking after air, water, food, and shelter. Information is crucial as a significant part of our social existence depends on it. Perhaps, there is no occupation in recorded human history in which information is so crucially required, at every point in time and all year round than in agriculture. Farmers need information to cope with vagaries of

weather, they require information on how to manage the often fluctuating price of farm produce, how to contain the often problematic issue of crop and livestock disease, pest hazards, and weed control. Farmers require information on how to deal with moisture insufficiency, soil infertility, soil erosion, and how to store excess farm produce (which is usually the case during the harvest period of abundance) to take care of the period of want. Improved crop seedling, mechanised agriculture, access to farm credit, labour shortage, availability of fertilizer, and so forth, are gray areas in which the farmer seek information.



There are many sources on information to farmers generally, but rural farmers have limited sources of relevant and timely information on agricultural activities. Arguably, the modern mass media such as the newspaper, magazine, television and the internet do provide information on almost all subjects, including agriculture; nevertheless, their messages do not effectively reach rural farmers, or as many research studies show, the modern mass media do not have the required impact in terms of motivating change and development (Mukhopadhyay, 2007). In agreement with this position, Obasi and Ebirim (2014, p.89) posit:

Given the characteristics of rural dwellers, it is arguable whether the modern information and communication technologies can adequately enhance the required participation in development process in the rural settings and at the same time sustain new ideas and knowledge. More importantly, the issue of cost, inadequate infrastructure (electricity), illiteracy and high resistance to foreign ideas might constitute a problem.

Reinforcing the inadequacy of the borrowed Western mass media to effectively take care of the information needs of rural dwellers, Wilson (1987) brilliantly notes that the truth (about indigenous communication systems) is that they may be old and different, in their principles, from the new systems introduced from abroad but they remain what sustains the information needs of the rural people, which represent over 70% of the national populations of most Third World states. One of the major militating factors against the use of mass media to achieve effective rural information dissemination is illiteracy.

Mukhopadhyay (2007) sheds light on this position by asserting that the high rate of illiteracy added to the inadequate reach of mass media impede almost 80% of Indian population who reside in the rural areas. Indeed, as noted by Mukhopadhyay (2007), 90% of the world's population lives in developing countries and over 70% of them live in rural areas; over 68% of rural dwellers engage in agriculture, mainly practicing subsistence farming. These figures are true reflection of the situation in Nigeria where over 78% of the population resides in rural communities and over 70% of them take to farming as the only available occupation.

The point that is being made thus far is that the indigenous or traditional systems or media of communication are by far more effective than the modern mass media in disseminating information in the rural areas. Obasi and Ebirim (2014, p.89) identify the elements that make indigenous communication systems very attractive to the rural population. According to him:

There are some basic elements that make indigenous communication strategies so attractive in sending messages of development at grassroots. Messages disseminated through indigenous media are entertaining, memorable, attractive, and more in tune with our cultural ideals. Messages disseminated through indigenous media are so attractive and entertaining that people unconsciously find themselves adopting new ideas relating to farming techniques, family planning, health, literacy and environmental education, etc., without losing meaning to the message. Indigenous communication strategies are so undisruptive, easily accessible, affordable and flexible that the message



recipient can be engaged in more than one activity at a time. Farmers in Otuocha need regular useful information on all aspects of their farm operations, the kind of information that is rooted in their culture, which they can trust and use to tackle basic problems of their agricultural experience. This is because farmers do not get the required information on agriculture from the available mass media channels, so they turn their information searchlight to indigenous communication systems for regular provision of such information. It is against this backdrop that this paper investigates the use of indigenous media of communication for the dissemination of agricultural information to rural farmers in Otuocha community, Anambra State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- i. Find out the extent to which farmers in Otuocha community access agricultural information through the indigenous media of communication.
- ii. Determine the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers to access agricultural information.
- iii. Ascertain the effectiveness of the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers.
- iv. Determine the kind of agricultural information that Otuocha farmers access through the indigenous communication forms.
- v. Identify the problem militating against the use of indigenous media forms by Otuocha farmers.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide the conduct of this study:

- i. What is the extent to which farmers in Otuocha community access agricultural information through the indigenous media of communication?
- ii. What are the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers to access agricultural information?
- iii. How effective are the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers?
- iv. What kind of agricultural information do Otuocha farmers access through the indigenous media forms?
- v. What are the problems militating against the use of indigenous media forms by farmers in Otuocha?

Method

The study adopted the survey research method. The survey is "a study of the characteristics of a sample through questioning which enables a researcher to make generalizations concerning his population of interest" (Ohaja, 2003, cited in Asemah, Nwammuo and Edegoh, 2014, p. 105). The survey was used because it helps to understand and make descriptive assertions about a large population and also it makes data arrangement and computation easy. Survey, therefore, is the most appropriate method for gathering and measuring data relating to demographics, attitude, opinion and perception (Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo and Okpanachi, 2012). The population of this study is the farmers in Otuocha, Anambra East local government area. The population of registered farmers in Otuocha in 2014 was 960 according to the information



made available by the secretary of the Farmers' Association, Otuocha zone.

The sample size for the research was 100 farmers drawn from Otuocha. The choice of 100 respondents as the sample size for the study was informed by the principle set forth by Nwana (1981), cited in Edegoh, Ezeh and Samson (2015, p. 64) that "if the population is a few hundreds, a 40% or more sample will do; if many hundreds, a 20% sample will do; if a few thousands, a 10% sample will do; and if several thousands, a 5% sample or less will do". The sampling technique best suited for the study was purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique enables the researcher to select the respondents based on certain criteria, in this case those who were farmers. Non farmers were not eligible for the study.

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Male	67	67.0
Female	33	33.0
Total	100	100.0

Table 1 presents data on the sex of the respondents. As could be gleaned from the table 67% of the respondents were males while 33% were females. This implies that majority of the respondents were males. The reason for this disparity is because more men than women were registered members of the Farmers Association in Otuocha community.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
18 - 30	25	25%
31 - 40	30	30%
41 and above	45	45%
Total	100	100.0

Table 2 shows the age distribution of the respondents. Data in

So, the researcher purposively selected 100 farmers in Otuocha community for the study.

The study employed the questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The 16-item questionnaire had two sections; section A was on respondents' demographic information and section B was designed to answer the research questions. The questionnaire was used because of its capacity to facilitate the collection of large amount of data in a relatively short period of time. Data collected were analysed using the percentage method and frequency tables.

Results

All the one hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire administered to respondents were returned and found usable, making 100% return rate.

Table 2 indicate that 25% of the respondents were between 18-30 years of age, 30% were between 31-40 years old, and 45% of the respondents were aged 41- years and above.

Table 3: Marital Status of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Single	30	30%
Married	70	70%
Total	100	100.0

Table 3 contains data on respondents' marital status and the data show that 30% of the respondents were single while 70% were married. It is therefore, evident that the majority of participants in the study were married.

Table 4: Respondents' Level of Education

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	41	41%
Secondary	51	51%
Tertiary	8	8%
Total	100	100.0



Table 4 shows data on respondents' level of education. As shown in the table 41% of the respondents attended primary school, 51% had secondary education training, and 8% attended tertiary institution. Thus, majority of the respondents had secondary and primary education.

Table 5: Religion of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Christians	88	88%
Pagans	10	10%
Others	2	25
Total	100	100.0

Table 5 shows respondents religious affiliation. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents were Christians and 10% of the respondents were Pagans. However, 2% claimed they had no religion. The majority of participants in the study were Christians.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One

What is the extent to which farmers in Otuocha community access agricultural information through the indigenous media of communication?

Table 6: Agricultural Information via Indigenous Communication Media

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
To a very high extent	30	30%
To a high extent	45	45%
To a low extent	15	15%
To a very low extent	10	10%
Total	100	100.0

The table above contains data obtained to determine the extent of access to the indigenous communication media by the respondents. As indicated in the table, 30% of the respondents said that their access to agricultural information through the indigenous media was "to a very high extent" and 45% indicated "to a high extent". However, 15% said their access to

agricultural information through the indigenous communication media was "to a low extent" and 10% felt theirs was "to a very low extent". This implies that majority of the respondents' access to agricultural information through home-grown communication media was high.

Research Question Two

What are the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers to access agricultural information?

Table 7: The Indigenous Media Forms in Use in Otuocha Community

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Village square meeting	8	8%
Town crier	42	42%
Union meeting	44	44%
Through visits	6	6%
Others	-	0.0
Total	100	100.0



The above table contains data obtained to establish the indigenous media forms used by the farmers in Otuocha community. As shown in the table, the indigenous media forms used by farmers in Otuocha include village square meeting (8%), town crier (42%), farmers' union or association meeting (44%), and through visits to other farmers (6%). The "others" response option scored zero as it was not chosen by

any participant. We deduce from data obtained for research question two that the indigenous communication forms used by farmers in Otuocha community are union meetings and town crier, in the main, as well as village square meetings and visits.

Research Question Three

How effective are the indigenous media forms used by Otuocha farmers?

Table 8: The Effectiveness of the Indigenous Communication Media

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	50	50%
Effective	35	35%
Not effective	7	7%
Undecided	8	8%
Total	100	100.0

Table 8 contains information obtained to answer research question three which sought to ascertain how effective the indigenous communication media are. The table shows 50% of the respondents believed the indigenous communication systems are very effective (50%) and many said the media forms are effective (35%). However, 7% and 8% of the respondents chose the response options "not effective" and "undecided"

respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents agreed that the indigenous communications systems are very effective.

Research Question Four

What kind of information do farmers in Otuocha community access through the indigenous media forms of communication?

Table 9: Kinds of Agricultural Information Accessed using Indigenous Media

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
How to improve farming methods	31	31%
Improve crop species	25	25%
Knowledge of agric supplements	17	17%
Storage methods and facilities	25	25%
Commercial farming	2	2%
Total	100	100.0

Data in table 9 were obtained to determine the kind of agricultural information that respondents access using indigenous media forms. Data show that 31% identified how to improve

farming methods as the agricultural information they accessed through the use of indigenous media forms, 25% indicated improved crop species, and 17% gained knowledge of agricultural supplements. Others include 25% that



obtained information on storage methods and facilities and 2% that learnt commercial farming techniques.

We infer from data generated for research question 4 that the respondents obtained a lot of agricultural information through the use of the indigenous media of communication, such as how to improve methods of farming, how to improve crop species, methods of storage of farm produce as well as the storage facilities available to rural farmers for

safe-keep of agricultural products, and knowledge of agricultural supplements. These were the major agricultural information made available to farmers in Otuocha community through the indigenous media forms of communication.

Research Question Five

What are the problems militating against the use of the indigenous communication forms by farmers in Otuocha community?

Table 10: Problems militating against the use of indigenous communication forms

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate communication with extension workers	19	19%
Poor agric information	40	40%
Limited audience	17	17%
Lack of fidelity	21	21%
Impression	3	3%
Total	100	100.0

The above table contains data designed to establish the problem confronting farmers in their day-to-day use of the indigenous communication media in seeking agricultural information. The table clearly shows the problems of using indigenous communication for seeking agricultural information include inadequate communication with extension workers (19%), poor agricultural (40%), and limited audience (17%). Others are lack of fidelity (21%) and impression (3%). This implies that poor agricultural information, lack of fidelity, inadequate communication with extension workers and limited audience constitute the major problems Otuocha farmers encounter by using indigenous communication systems.

Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study are as revealing as they are interesting. First and foremost, the study found that the extent to which farmers in Otuocha community access agricultural information through the indigenous communication media is high. This means that most of the rural farmers studied obtain their agricultural information from the traditional forms of communication. This finding is in line with the democratic participant media theory that stresses the need for access and right to communication by all and that religious institutions like churches, mosques and many others in the society should have or own the media. This finding is also a confirmation of the submission of Wilson (1987) that the truth (about indigenous communication systems) is that though they may be old and different, in their principles, from the new systems introduced from abroad, they remain what sustains the



information needs of the rural people, which represent over 70% of the national populations of most Third World states.

Findings further show that the indigenous media of communication used by Otuocha farmers are very effective. They are effective because they provide the rural farmers with most of the information needs they have as farmers.

Moreover, findings of the study show the different kinds of information that are made available to rural farmers in Otuocha community through the indigenous media of communication. These include information on how to improve farming methods, how to improve crop species, knowledge of agricultural supplements, storage methods and available storage facilities as well as information on how to embark on profitable commercial farming. The outcome of this studies reinforces the finding of Achugbue and Anie (2011) that the areas of information needs of the rural female farmers in Delta State are information on crop production (43.83%), treatment of animals (29.45%), preservation of farm produce (29.45%), pest control (29.45%), etc. The position of this study further agrees with the result of Bachhav (2012) which shows that the areas of information needs of farmers he investigated are new crop production (70.82%), seed's availability (74.29%), availability of insecticide (62.29%), water management (34.28%), availability of fertilizer (64.58%), weather information (23.42%), and new agricultural equipment (17.72%). Findings of the study therefore, established the various information types that the indigenous media provide to rural farmers, and indeed residents in rural setting.

Finally, findings reveal the kind of problems faced by respondents in using

the indigenous media for agricultural information. These problems are identified to include inadequate communication with extension workers, poor agricultural information, limited audience, lack of fidelity and imprecision. The study establish that the major problems militating against effective use of the indigenous media in seeking agricultural information include poor agricultural information, lack of fidelity, inadequacy in communication with agricultural extension workers, and limited audience (in descending order). The cardinal tenets of the development media theory could be used to explain the position of this study. The theory holds that there are certain characteristics that lead to set back of the press in developing countries, they include limited availability of media literate audience, limited supply of requisite professional skills and dependence on the developed world for technology skills and cultural products (Asemah, 2011).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was carried out to examine the extent to which Otuocha farmers access agricultural information through the use of indigenous communication systems and to ascertain the kind of information that farmers in Otuocha community access through the indigenous communication media. It was established that most farmers in Otuocha community access agricultural information mainly through the use of indigenous communication and that the kind of information that they access through the indigenous media of communication include how to improve farming methods, how to utilise improved crop seedling and information relating to storage of farm produce and availability of storage facilities, among others. We therefore, conclude that the indigenous



media of communication are very useful in disseminating agricultural and other kinds of information to farmers in the rural area.

Based on the findings, we recommend that:

- The indigenous media of communication should be used in disseminating agricultural, social, Political, economic and cultural information to rural farmers and other rural residents.
- Extension workers should endeavour to visit rural areas to enlighten them on improved methods of farming such as agricultural supplements.
- Farmers should also avail themselves of the opportunity of using other sources of farm or agricultural information such as radio, television and mobile phone so as to enhance their access to agricultural information.

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