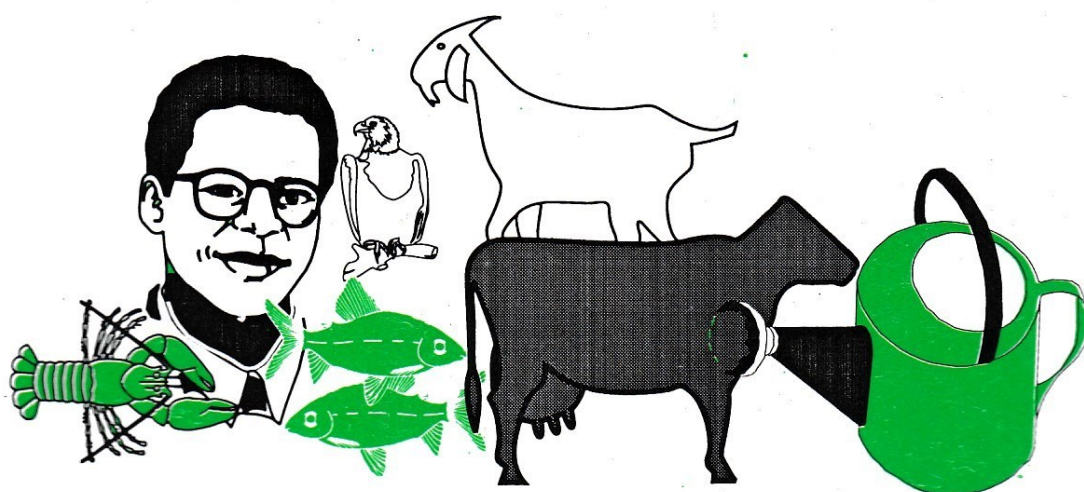


JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

VOL 6, NO. 1, 2008

JOAFSS



FOSTERING PROGRESSIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

www.ajol.info/journals/joafss

ISSN 1597-0906

ACCESSING MARKETING INFORMATION SERVICES AND STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY AKWA IBOM STATE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME.

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine market information services and strategies adopted by Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP) to farmers in the state. The specific objectives of the study were to, i) identify the relationship between the extension approach adopted by extension agents and the marketing information strategies; ii) to find out the relationship between the information system and marketing of agricultural produce in the state; iii) to determine the period of disseminating information to farmers and iv) to identify the constraints to marketing information dissemination in the state.

Structured pretested face and content validated questionnaire was administered and data collected from 300 farmers randomly selected from four of the six agricultural zones in Akwa Ibom State. Similarly, 100 extension agents (EAS) randomly selected from the four agricultural zones, took part in the study. Data collected were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics. Marketing of agricultural produce was found to be influenced by lack of awareness, over dependency on production information, non-availability of subject matter specialists, and tools to aid extension agents in the dissemination of market information.

Keywords: Agricultural Development, Information, Marketing strategies, Akwa Ibom State.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural development for a developing economy like Nigeria is centered on increasing the physical productivity, re-organizing available resources to produce more and improving the quality of resources available for farm production. Hardly, if ever, is it explicitly recognized that market and marketing improvements are essential for sustaining agricultural development. This misconception suggests that information on marketing of agricultural produce and products deserve lower priority as compared to production in our development efforts. The concept of agricultural information stems from the fact that information is the basic resource in all decision making. The availability of good information leads to good management as well as reduce consequence of ignorance. Carter (1990) asserted that information are facts and ideas presented in meaningful form, a representation or model from some aspect

of the real world. It is an aggregation processing of data to provide knowledge or intelligence or reduce uncertainty of the user. Aina (1990) defined agricultural information as all published and unpublished knowledge on aspects of agriculture required to improve agricultural production. Among the agro-information categories is the marketing information which is chiefly concerned with the marketing of agricultural products, policies, cooperatives and area of needs. Despite marketing information usefulness to farmers, extension workers, agro-based industries as well as policy makers, it seems to be avoided by researchers either due to seasonality of products mostly produced by the rural farmers or fluctuation in prices of such produce. Cees Leeuwis,(2003) confirmed that in the neo-classical economic theory, a 'perfect market' is in principle the most efficient way of exchanging goods and services while Busch and Houston (1995),viewed marketing information system as a structured interacting complex of persons, machines and procedures designed to generate an orderly flow of information sources for use as input to marketing decision making. Data for information systems are regularly collected and continuously updated. These data come from both intra and extra firm sources and is converted into useful information for use. James (2000) opined that since information transfer is very essential, agricultural information needs to be communicated to the users as communication is information exchange. Sometimes, the information is available but one does not know where and how to obtain it. Also, time and the necessary facilities may not be available to trap and use such information. There is a gap between what knowledge is available and the actual practice. These gaps according to Chandler (1990) have adversely affected free flow of information. The demand for information is not matched by the flow of supply. Despite governmental and non-governmental institutions in agricultural research and practice, the transfer of agricultural innovations to farmers and adoption of these innovations for crop and animal production, farmers still have difficulty in marketing their produce to break even or make profit on time. These result in produce wastage, forcing many farmers to produce just enough for home and immediate consumption. Ogunbameru etal(2008) opined that government at the federal, state and local government levels, non-governmental organizations, farmers associations and other stake-holders should collaborate and effectively participate as may be required in order to guarantee, among other things, the proper storage, distributions and sales of agricultural produce as these will effectively control periods of excesses and shortfalls in harvest and sustain continuity of interest and required efforts in farming. The challenge now is how to best harness the different elements of demand into articulating a coherent and focused national programme for marketing information flow where the end users can benefit to enhance and sustain their livelihood.

The Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Programme (AKADEP) is responsible for transferring innovative information to farmers. Yet, farmers still complain of low returns;since agricultural production is seasonal, price fluctuation and wastage of agricultural produce is always a problem to these farmers. Against this background, this study was conducted, with a view to identifying what information strategies extension agents use in transferring marketing information to farmers and how the farmers see these channels of marketing information services used by the extension agents.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

Akwa Ibom State falls between latitude 4^o 3' and 5^o 3' North and longitude 7^o 35' and 8^o 25' East. She is bounded by Rivers State in the North, by Abia State in the East, by the Atlantic Ocean in the West and Cross River State in the South. The state has an area of 7,245,935sqkm with a shoreline of

129km. About 3million people dwell in the state.(National Population Census, 2005). The rainy season which commences from early March and continues into late October, is binomial with a major peak (over 5400mm) occurring in July and September, mostly along the coastline areas. There is usually a short dry spell in August, the so called 'August break'. Sunny days occur during the rainy season. However, cloud overcast reduces hours of sunshine. The soil type of Akwa Ibom State ranges from the compact clay loam soil through loose deep sandy soil, to the gravely loam soil. (Ministry of Information, Uyo. 2008). Most rural dwellers in the state are engaged in farming. They keep livestock as well as produce several types of crops. Mixed cropping is a popular cropping system which usually comprises such crops like oil palm, cassava, maize, yam, cocoyam, potatoes, banana and plantain which are scattered in a semi-wild form on farms. Sitting astride the Bight of Bonny gives the state a definite advantage in seafood resources from rivers and creeks. Additionally, it boasts of the continental shelf, which stretches through the entire coastline, blessed with unpolluted water and the largest concentration of different species of fishes in the country. Fishing activities in the hinterland supersede the cultivation of crops. Crayfish and other fish species like tilapia (Ibibio:asat), heterocania (Ibibio:obon), and heterobrancus (Ibibio:inagha) are commonly found and sold either in the dry or fresh form. These farmers also engage in selling and marketing their produce. Three hundred (300) rural farmers were selected from the four agricultural zones for the study. Also, 100 extension agents from the four zones took part in the study. The total amount of respondents for the study was 400.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio cultural and economic factors play an important role in agricultural information and marketing (Olayide *et al*, 1981). Such socio-cultural and economic factors as the level of education, age, status, land tenure, attitude, level of income and capital positions influence the farmers willingness to accept new ideas.

Table 1: Some personal characteristics of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage%
Less than 20	20	6.8
21-30	76	25.3
31-40	88	29.3
41-50	37	12.3
51-60	48	16.0
60and above	03	10.3
Total	300	100

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	266	92.0

Single	12	8.0
Total	300	100
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	98	32.2
Male	202	67.3
Total	300	100

Source: field survey 2008

Table 1 above shows some personal characteristics of the respondents. Analysis of the distribution indicates that 6.8% of the respondents were less than 20 years, 25.3% were 21-30 years. About twenty nine percent(29.3%) of the respondents were 31-40 years old while 16% were 51-60 years old. Those between the age range of 41-50 years of age represented 12.3% of the distribution. Respondents above 61 years were 10.3% of the distribution. The pattern of age distribution in this study shows that the proportion of those in the younger age group is higher. It also indicates that majority of the respondents fall between 20 and 50 years, showing a clear proportion of active farmer population. Further analysis of Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents were married. Marital status has an effect on the dissemination of information in the rural areas. Most married couples tend to be aware of current developments in agricultural pricing and marketing as either or both husband and wife may acquire such information. Obibuaku (1983) asserted that in the majority of African countries, the farmers rely on family labour for production and marketing. Lawan (1992), posited that Labour, generally speaking, is human efforts of any kind 'manual or mental, skilled or unskilled, scientific or artistic. Also, marketing involves a collective contribution of ideas, skills and projections basically in the economic and mathematical spheres. In Nigeria and Akwa Ibom State in particular, the general attitude to agriculture is that every man and woman is a farmer. Based on this value system, every family and community ensures that all members are dependent on farm work and possibly, selling of farm produce. According to global statistics, women make up 51-55% of the population of most African countries (Kpohazoude, 1994). Although division of labour had been widely reported, it is also a known fact that both male and female members of the rural community have different but complimentary responsibilities for the survival of the community. Evidence from several studies in Nigeria have led to the conclusion that women participate in almost all farming activities alongside men, although their specific tasks vary from place to place depending on different cultures. Specifically, Nigerian women undertake a significant proportion of the workload in crop production and animal husbandry (Avene and Omorege, 1996). In general, land preparation is male task while seeding and weeding is performed by both sexes. Men also market agricultural produce, depending on the type. Table 1 also reveals that male farmers form the bulk of respondents. Out of the 300 farmers, 67.3% were males while 32.7% were females. Although women are generally known to form the bulk of farmers in the rural area, the ratio of female to male in the study is very low. This is not unconnected with women's inability to acquire resources such as land and services required to facilitate performance. It is of note that agricultural extension agents prefer to direct their services toward males since men are regarded as the heads of households. Another obvious obstacle militating against increasing women participation in extension as expressed by Women in Nigerian

Economy, (1991) is the generally low level of education with an estimated illiteracy rate of between 55% and 65%. The dominance of male folk in farming as reflected in Table 1 is not unconnected with the land tenure system in operation which limits women access to land. It could as well have been caused by increased willingness on the part of male folk to play more active role in agricultural production and marketing by virtue of their positions and obligations. There is also this assumption that market and marketing trends do not favour women because of their limited economic returns. For women as producers and marketers, the control of resources are biased in favour of men with the result that women became mere workers without guaranteed rights to the resource base. In modern times, it is observed that women farmers can be just as productive as men when given access to the same resources. They too can adequately transfer production and market information to their peers frequently. (Women in Nigerian Economy, (2000).

Table 2: Strategies for Information Transfer and Degree of use by AKADEP.

Radio	Television	Newspaper	Group meeting	Internet	Posters	Town crier
11	1	1	111	x	11	11

Source: field survey 2008. Key: 111= weekly, 11=sparingly, 1= once in months, x= never.

Table 3: Access to Marketing Information by Farmers.

Channels of information	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	01	0.3
Newspaper	04	1.4
Extension agents	55	18.3
Friends/neighbors	240	80
Total	300	100

Source: Field survey, 2008

Table 3 indicates that extension agents rarely use the television, newspapers, posters, radio and town crier for transferring agricultural information to farmers. The most used strategy being the group method organized weekly. This means that very few farmers get information on weekly basis. This is followed by radio and posters which the extension agents use sparingly. Television and posters are used when there are very urgent and important information like the outbreak of epidemics, pests and or diseases. None of the respondents agreed to have used the internet to disseminate information to farmers. Rural people obtain information from many sources. Information may come from extension agents, friends and neighbours, mass media, internet etc. It is the duty of extension agents to introduce an innovation and induce farmers to adopt them with full participation for sustainability. It is also the responsibility of extension agents to inform farmers on the know-how about marketing of such produce or products and the technicalities involved in the marketing process. To achieve this, farmers must be

exposed to the right marketing channels where the products can be marketed. It is therefore the role of AKADEP to effectively disseminate information on the proper handling, processing, storage and packaging of agricultural product and also inform them on the right channels where their produce can be marketed. The various variables responsible for the creation of awareness among the respondents in respect to marketing information and their strategies identified are presented in Table 2. Equally, the farmers as stated in table 3 responded that they get most of their marketing information from friends and neighbours as 80% or a frequency of 240 respondents showed from the table. This is followed by extension agents with a frequency of 55 and a percentage of 18.3. Newspaper and radio had a percentage of 1.4 and 1.3 % respectively. No respondent got his marketing information from the television, internet, poster, or town crier. This is because the respondents may not have had access to electronic or print media or because marketing information especially for perishable goods fluctuates indiscriminately.

Table 4: below shows the distribution of respondents to marketing channels used.

Marketing channels	Frequency	Percentage
Wholesale market	50	16.7
Retail market	200	66.6
Contact market	50	16.7
Total	300	100

Source: field survey 2008

Table 4 above indicates that 66.6% of the respondents with frequency of 200 have retail outlets as their marketing channels. Wholesale and contact markets accounted for 16.7% and 16.7% respectively. Most agricultural produce in the state is sold either at the farm gate or domestic markets in retail form. Produce like palm oil, crayfish and dry fish are sold through contact market and wholesale markets respectively. Most farmers interviewed preferred to market their produce through group efforts. Rural farmers complain of wastage and loss of produce as most of them are perishable. Farmers are not properly guided on the preservative measures and storage formalities to be used in preserving their produce. In most of the markets visited, produce were left to rot away if there is no immediate buyer. The AKADEP is responsible for disseminating information on produce handling, processing and storage of some agricultural products. Therefore, extension agents whose main responsibility is to change the attitudes, skills and knowledge of the rural dwellers, have the responsibility of educating farmers on where, when and how to market their produce. They too are responsible for coaxing farmers to record pricing information that will guide them as at when due. Since their produce might not be bulky enough for contact marketing, farmers should also be advised to form and /or join cooperative bodies who will allow for pooling their resources together to attract market. Failure to do these may still place farmers as peasants despite producing at a relatively larger proportion. According to Ijere and Mbanasor (1998), the most widely used channel for marketing of agricultural produce in the rural community is through the retail outlet, where the farmers sell their produce at the farm gate. Those who sell unprocessed produce have middle men who come to buy them with a determined market price. In this case, farmers are at the receiving end, since these middle men determine how much and how many they are to buy.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

AKADEP is vested with the responsibility of transferring agricultural innovative ideas to the rural populace. Of recent, the AKADEP has scored a pass mark in the transfer of production information to farmers but findings in this study have shown that they do not transfer marketing information. It is of note that sustained high level of agricultural production and income are not possible without effective market information by the extension services supported by research recommendations on the know-how of marketing information system. The failure of the marketing information services is however tied to the inactive commercial department of AKADEP vested with the responsibility of transferring agricultural price index and forecasting price fluctuations to farmers who will be guided and thus stay in business. Nevertheless, myriads of artificial problems identified in this study have been found to confront both the extension agent and its agency (AKADEP). These problems act in concert to hinder the development of farmers specifically and agriculture in general. They range from non-availability of tools for market information, non-availability of subject matter specialists to over concentration on production information. These problems result in wastage of agricultural produce during times of bumper harvest to non-availability of these produce within a short time after harvest. With these problems occurring, the concept thus portrays extension as low-performing with questionable benefits that thus lessens the impact and effectiveness of the extension services. In this vein, concrete steps should be taken by AKADEP to install and perpetuate a viable and dynamic marketing information system capable of changing positively, the lives of rural farmers and moving Akwa Ibom State and indeed Nigeria forward.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are thus made: the provision of facilities to the commercial department of AKADEP to implement marketing information services to farmers; training of subject matter specialists (sms) to be abreast with marketing information system. Formation of agricultural cooperative societies where resources will be pooled together for profit marketing; the use of radio and television for marketing information dissemination; and comprehensive price index recorded on monthly basis of agricultural produce in the state should be kept in the commercial department of AKADEP for reference.

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