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FARMERS PERCEPTION OF CONSTRAINTS TO LOCAL LEADERS ROLES IN AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION DISSEMINATION IN ORLU AGRICULTURAL ZONE, IMO STATE, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed perceived constraints to roles of local leaders in effective agricultural information dissemination among farmers in Orlu Agricultural Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include to: examine the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, identify perceived sources of agricultural information available to the local leaders, determine perceived roles of local leaders to farmers, ascertain perceived extent of satisfaction among farmers of the roles of the local leaders and Identify perceived constraints to effective performance of local leaders' roles in agricultural information dissemination. Data were collected using questionnaire administered to 112 local leaders and analysed using simple statistical tool as frequency distribution, percentages, mean and likert type scale measuring instrument. The result of the study showed that most of the farmers were males (53.8%). The study revealed that extension agents ($\bar{x}$=2.6), friends and neighbours $\bar{x}$=2.7 were the major sources of information available to the respondents. Majority (78%) of the respondents play the role of legitimizing extension development efforts. Most of the farmers were satisfied with the local leaders roles having scored mean of 2.0 and above in most of the criteria used in assessing them. Perceived constraints identified include: lack of training, extension contact and motivation for local leaders by extension agents. Finally, the study recommended among others strong government support for extension agents in providing adequate training through workshops, seminars etc for the local leaders to perform their roles most effectively.

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Keywords: Perceived constraints, Roles, Local Leaders, Farmers, Agricultural Information Dissemination.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Today famers are under unprecedented pressure. The world population is closing in on seven billion, and it is projected to reach nine billion by 2050 (Towery and werblow, 2010). Two-thirds of the world's agricultural value added is estimated to be created in developing countries (World Bank 2008).

Nigeria as a sub-Saharan African country happens to belong to among other few that have greatly retarded from their past glorious height in agriculture, down to a near zero scale of agricultural production. Surely this neglect is a result of irresponsible and ill purposeful leadership (Matthew and Adegboye, 2008). Agriculture contributed only 12% to the GDP in 1970 which culminated in raising the food import bill leading to the persistent huge deficit in the balance of payment over the years (Ugwu 2007). Agriculture apart from being a source of food supply for the teeming population, it also serves as a foreign exchange earner as well as feeding our industries with the raw materials. In the light of the forgoing agriculture is still a major source as well as remains the corner stone of the Nigerian economy (Igboeli, 2000, Obonna, 2010)

In the past few years, it has become obvious that the demand for food in Nigeria has out stripped the supply. It is important therefore, that we explore measures that will enhance agricultural production and increase the achievement level of the technology/innovation to spread in our respective regions of operation. This can be achieved through agricultural extension service. The introduction of agricultural extension services in Nigeria has tremendously improved the nation's agricultural practices and production. Mgbada (2010) defines agricultural extension as an informal educational system which assists rural people in improving farming methods and techniques and other agro-based occupation, increasing production and service efficiency, income and improving the socio-economic and educational levels of the rural dwellers.

Agricultural extension service achieves its goal of information dissemination through use of personal contact, print and electronic media regarded as mass media. Mass media which is a means of information dissemination are spreading agricultural technologies to the farmers at a faster rate than personal contact, (Khusuk and Memon, 2004). They opined that production and distribution of printed material helps farmers in the transfer of new information and technologies. The involvement of information dissemination to agricultural extension services enhances even development and it brings wider coverage of new agricultural research findings meant to reach

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farmers. Similarly, local leaders are very important means of agricultural information dissemination.

A leader is one who goes first or one having the authority to direct others. Leaders assume responsibilities for certain activities in extension agents' absence; helps to organize local extension groups, assist directly in the spread of new ideas and practice by demonstrating them in their fields; and generally serve as a point of contact between the agent and the farmer. The principle of use of these local leaders is that they serve as loud speakers for extension for without their use, most of the planned programmes will not be achieved (Adereti and Ajayi (2011). For agriculture to improve in our country there is a need to select local leaders, train, equip and use them in the different agricultural extension works. Local Leaders are those whose interest centres in the community and whose leadership rest on elaborate network of personal relationships (Ekong, 2003). The local leaders join voluntary organizations in order to make contacts, tend to hold political offices and if they are educated, tend to read the local newspapers and other printed materials which assist them in information gathering (Williams, 1984).

No local extension worker can do the work effectively by himself, he needs assistance. If it is assumed that there should be one extension agent to about 250 farm families, it then means that Nigeria has not been able to produce one-tenth of the required extension agents. Since it will take years to produce the large number of extension workers, the only reasonable answer to handling such a large number of farmers is to make use of local leaders. In order to utilize the local leaders, the extension agent should be able to identify leaders, develop and train leaders, make best use of them in the dissemination of agricultural extension information.

However, there are challenges, related to the use of local leaders in disseminating agricultural information as observed by Williams et al (1984). First, the local leaders may give wrong interpretation of the program thus, bringing the credibility of the agent to question. They may introduce their own opinion, value and judgment to the programme and they may not be good teaches and will therefore not be as effective in giving out the programme to the people. Local leaders may not be able to spend the required amount of time to receive adequate training that enables them to be effective in the programme. While performing these roles, the farmers do perceive that certain constraints affect the local leaders in effective performance of their roles in agricultural information dissemination. As a result, this study identified the perceived constraint among farmers to the roles of local leaders in dissemination of agricultural information in Orlu Agricultural Zone of Imo State. The specific objectives were to:

1. examine the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers.

2. identify perceived sources of agricultural information to the local leaders

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3. determine perceived roles of local leaders in information dissemination to the farmers,

4. ascertain perceived extent of satisfaction of the roles of local leaders in information dissemination among farmers.

5. Identify perceived constraints to local Leaders in the effective performance of their roles in information dissemination

2. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Orlu Agricultural Zone of Imo State which is made up of eleven (11) local government areas namely; Orlu, Orsu, Isu, Nkwere, Oru-west, Oru east, Ideato north, Njaba, Nwangele, Ohiaji/Egbema and Oguta. Multi stage sampling techniques were used to select the sample. In the first stage, four (4) local government areas were selected from the Zone namely; Nwangele, Njaba, Oguta and Nkwere. The second stage involved selection of four (4) communities from each of the for local government areas to give a total of sixteen (16) communities from the zone. Seven (7) farmers were selected from each of the communities to give a total of one hundred and twelve (112) respondents. All selections were done using random sampling technique since they have similar characteristic. The lists of the communities and the farmers were collected from community development officers and the extension agents respectively working in various local government areas. Data were obtained by use of questionnaire administered to the 112 respondents. Simple descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, and frequency distribution were used to achieve objectives 1 and 3. Likert-type rating scale was used for objectives 2, 4 and 5.

The likert scaling type measuring instrument is represented by the formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum Fx}{N}$$

Where $\bar{x}$ = mean score

$\sum$ = summation sign

$\overline{F}$ = frequency

N = no of respondents.

x = no of nominal value of each response category

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The different scale statement used were 'most available' 'available' and 'not available'; 'highly satisfied' 'satisfied' and 'not satisfied' and 'very serious' 'serious' and 'not serious' for objectives 2, 4 and 5 respectively. The means of the scaling statement was found as:

$$\frac{3+2+1}{3} = \frac{6}{3} = 2.0$$

Therefore, 2 is the weighed means of the scaling statement.

Decision rule: Any mean value greater or equal to 2.0 is positive.

Any mean value less than 2.0 is negative.

3.0 RESULTS AND DICUSSION

3.1. Distribution of respondents according to socio-economic characteristics.

Table 1 shows that majority (53.8%) of the farmers were males and 77.8% and of them between the ages of 40 and 59 years. This implies that that majority of the farmers were old time farmers. The result also shows that 45.5% had WASC/GCE/TC11 while 45.5% attended tertiary institutions. This implies that majority of the farmers were educated. Education is important because educated person can easily source information and adjust lifestyle. Most (77.6%) of the farmers were married, 8.9% were widowed and only 4% were single. The result further indicated that 40.2% and 59.8% of the famers agreed that they had no contact and contact respectively with the extension agents every month. This is an indication of non regular visitation by extension agents to the farmers. Ekwe (2004), reported that regular visitation by extension agents helps to transfer improved knowledge and creates avenue for one to one interaction with the farmers. Majority (46.4%) had farming experience of 11-29 years. Majority (91.8%) of the farmers agreed that they belonged to one social organization or the other. Nsabimana and Masobo (2013) agreed that social organizations are organized for promotion of special interest or to meet certain needs that cannot be achieved by an individual. It contributes to dissemination of new ideas practices and sourcing of loan. Most (58.0%) of the farmers practiced agriculture alone while 42% were engaged in farming and other businesses. According to Ewuziem (2009), an entrepreneur that has diversified sources of income could cushion the effect of poor performance of a particular enterprise from one another; however; full time paid to a business venture could enable the entrepreneur to discover certain important issues rather than allowing his or her staff to do everything.

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Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the farmers

Socio-economic characteristics	frequency	percentage	mean($\bar{x}$)
Sex			
Male	60	53.8	
Female	52	46.2	
Age			
20 – 29	4	4.0	
30 -39	8	7.2	
40 – 49	51	45.6	53.7
50 – 59	36	32.2	
60 – and above	13	11.0	
Educational level			
No formal education	2	1.8	
FSLC	12	10.8	
WASSC/GCE/TC11	51	45.5	
HND/B.Sc	42	37.4	
M.Sc/Ph.D	5	4.5	
Marital Status			
Single	4	3.5	
Married	87	77.6	
Separated	7	6.2	
Divorced	4	3.4	
Widowed	10	8.9	
Extension Contact (monthly)			
Yes	45	40.2	
No	55	59.8	
Main Occupation			
Farming	65	58.0	
Farming and Other business	47	42.0	
Experience as farmers			
1 – 10	42	37.5	
11 -20	52	46.4	11.4
21 – 30	14	12.5	
31 – Above	4	3.5	
Social Organization			
Yes	102	91.1	
No	10	8.9	
Household Size			
1 – 5	26	23.2	
6 – 10	60	55.6	7.7
11 – 15	26	23.2	

Source: Field Survey. 2015.

3.2. Perceived farmers sources of agricultural information available to the local leaders.

Table 2 shows that major sources of information available to the farmers included extension agents, Friends and neighbours, farmer co-operatives organizations, mobile phones and radio

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farmer programmme with mean of $\bar{x}$=2.6, $\bar{x}$=2.7, $\bar{x}$=2.4, $\bar{x}$=2.1 and $\bar{x}$=2.5 respectively. These sources agree with Nwachukwu, (2003) who confirmed them as major sources of agricultural information. Use of mobile phones, since its recent introduction in Nigeria, has become very effective in information dissemination. According to Salau, *et al* (2014), use of mobile phones in recent times, as a social communication network has proved very effective means of interaction among all involved in farming business. Other sources of information like Ezes/Village heads, newspaper etc were not recognized as major available sources of agricultural information.

Table 2. Distribution of farmers According to the perceived sources of information available to local leaders.

Sources of information available	Most Available (3)	Available (2)	Not Available (1)	Mean score $\bar{x}$	Remark
Extension agent	77	33	02	2.6	Available
Agricultural research institute	16	46	50	1.7	Not available
Agricultural shows	16	30	64	1.8	Not available
Fellow friends and neighbours	75	34	03	2.7	Available
Farmers' co-operative organization	61	37	13	2.4	Available
Village heads/Ezes	16	30	64	1.6	Not available
Television	21	34	57	1.7	Not Available
Radio farmer programme	57	37	18	2.5	Available
Newspaper	34	40	38	1.8	Not available
Posters	22	53	37	1.8	Not Available
Academic journals on agriculture	9	38	65	1.5	Not Available
Mobile phones	44	35	33	2.1	Available
E-mails	16	32	64	1.6	Not Available
Internets	10	30	72	1.5	Not Available

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

3.2. Farmers Perception of roles played by local leaders.

Table 3 shows the result of most of the farmers perception of roles played by the local leaders in their efforts toward the achievement of effective extension information delivery. These roles include legitimizing extension efforts in reaching farmers (78%), assisting extension agents in informing farmers about availability of farm inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds etc (76%), encouraging local farmers participation in extension demonstration activities (80%), serving as contact farmers (83%), assisting in settlement of disputes among farmers (82%), etc. These roles

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played by local leaders agreed with that of Benor and Baxter (1984), Assiabaka, C.C. (2002) and Mgbada, (2010).

Table 3: Distribution of farmers according to perceived roles of local leaders.

	Roles of Local Leaders	Frequency	Percentages (%)
-	Legitimizing extension development efforts.	88	78.
-	Serving as contact farmers	94	83
-	Encouraging local farmers' participation in demonstrating activities.	90	80
-	Advising farmers on need for formation of co-operative organization.	80	71
-	Taking farmers problems to research stations	50	45
-	Dissemination of extension packages to farmers.	73	65
-	Linking extension agents to farmers.	77	68
-	Advising farmers on use of improved agricultural practices.	75	66
-	Informing farmers on when farm inputs are available.	89	76
-	Encourage farmers to have strong leadership.	79	70
-	Assuming responsibilities for certain activities in the absence of E.A.	71	63
-	Facilitating effective extension communication.	82	75
-	Play role of dispute settlement	92	82
	Total	**112**	**100**

Source: field survey, 2015

3.4. The perceived extent of satisfaction among farmers in the role performance of local leaders roles.

Table 4 shows the perceived extent satisfaction the farmers were with the performance of the local leaders roles. They agreed that they were satisfied with most of the roles local leaders like legitimizing extension development efforts $\bar{x}$=2.9, serving as contact farmers $\bar{x}$=2.3, linking extension agents to farmers $\bar{x}$=2.1, advising farmers on formation of agricultural co-operative organizations $\bar{x}$=2.4, assisting agents in informing farmers on availability of farm inputs like

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fertilizers, improved seeds $\bar{x}$=2.2 and dispute settlements $\bar{x}$=2.5. Role like taking farmers problems to research stations $\bar{x}$=1.9 not performed satisfactorily to the farmers. Majority of the local leaders had mean score of 2.0 and above in most of the identified roles which implies that they were satisfied in the roles they play. According to Laogun, (2011), satisfaction in one's job or role encourages one to more action. Also satisfaction from one leaning experience stimulates desire for leaning in other fields.

Table 4: Distribution of farmers According the Extent of Satisfaction of Performance of their roles.

Roles of Local Leaders	highly Satisfied (3)	satisfied (2)	not satisfied (1)	mean score ($\bar{x}$)	remark
Legitimizing to extension development efforts	54	74	24	2.9	satisfied
Serves as contact farmer	40	62	10	2.3	satisfied
Encourages local farmers Participation	48	51	13	3.2	satisfied
Dissemination of extension packages to farmers	40	39	33	2.1	satisfied
Linking extension agents to farmers	45	35	32	2.1	satisfied
Taking farmers problems to research stations	31	28	53	1.9	not satisfied
Advising farmers on use of improved agricultural practices	40	31	31	2.0	satisfied
Advising farmers on formation of agric. cooperative	55	46	11	2.4	satisfied
Informing farmers on when farm inputs are available	42	49	21	2.2	satisfied
Encouraging farmers to have strong Leadership	50	42	20	2.2	satisfied
Assuming responsibilities for activities in absence of EA	45	36	31	2.1	satisfied
Facilitating effective extension Communication	55	33	24	2.4	satisfied

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Play role in dispute settlement	78	20	14	2.5	satisfied

Source: field survey, 2015

3.5 Perceived constraints among farmers associated with local leaders roles in information dissemination.

Table 5 shows the perceived constraints associated with local leaders in agricultural information dissemination. The perceived constraints included unavailability of funds among farmers to purchase inputs ($\bar{x}$=2.6), lack of democratic selection of local leaders ($\bar{x}$=2.4). This implies that local leader not selected democratically will be autocratic or laissez faire. According to Oladele and Afolayan (2011), democratically elected leader do work with group doing what others do, decide with members how tasks and work will be assigned, highly objective, determines reward and recipients with the group members. Bureaucracy on the part of the extension agents ($\bar{x}$=2.1), Extension contact with local leaders ($\bar{x}$=2,1). According to Keinde (2004), farmers response to adoption of new innovation can be increased by number of contacts especially through local leaders. Also included was lack training for the local leaders ($\bar{x}$=2.3). Illiteracy among farmers ($\bar{x}$=1.6) was not part of the constraints. Adejo *et.al* (2012), reported that the more educated the farmers are the more they become willing to accept innovations. Illiteracy among local leaders ($\bar{x}$=1.9) was also not a serious problem. This implies that most of the local leaders were educated and were able to interact with the extension agents and local farmers effectively. This means that most farmers were educated and did not find it difficult communicating with the local leaders.

Table 3.5 Distribution of farmers according to perceived Constraints Associated with Local Leaders in Information Dissemination to Farmers.

	Constraints	Very Serious (3)	Serious (2)	Not serious (1)	Mean score ($\bar{x}$)	Remark
-	Illiteracy among local leaders	15	45	52	1.9	Not Serious
-	Communication problem from research institution and universities	40	63	9	2.2	Serious
-	Unavailability of funds among farmers	75	37	0	2.6	Serious
-	Untimely information on availability Of farm inputs.	39	58	15	2.2	Serious
-	Poor co-ordination/supervision among	34	53	25	2.1	Serious

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	extension workers.				
-	Lack of training of the local leaders by extension agents (seminars, etc).	40	67	5	2.3 Serious
-	Land tenure issue	12	43	57	1.6 Not serious
-	Contact with extension staff	30	73	9	2.1 Serious
-	Lack of motivation of local leaders in term of stipends.	34	63	15	2.2 Serious
-	Misinterpretation of extension ideas for selfish gains.	85	24	3	2.7 Serious
-	Lack of democratic selection of Local leaders.	55	50	7	2.4 Serious
-	Problems of bureaucracy from the extension staff	30	63	19	2.1 Serious
	Illiteracy among farmers	13	42	57	1.6 Not serious

Source: Field survey, 2015.

4.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study assessed the perceived constraints to local leaders' roles in agricultural extension information dissemination in Orlu zone of Imo state, Nigeria. Majority of the farmers were males and agreed that the local leaders obtained their agricultural information from extension agents, friends and neighbours, mobile phones. The farmers were of the opinion that local leaders assisted extension agents in legitimizing their extension efforts in their communities as part of their roles. They were also satisfied with most of the roles the local leaders performed. The farmers perceived lack of adequate training, government bureaucracy, extension contact, among others, as some the serious constraints affecting local leaders in the effective performance of their roles.

The study recommended more extension agents contacts with local leaders and motivation by giving stipends to the local leaders by extension organization. Also there should be constant training for local leaders through seminars, conferences etc to update their knowledge in leadership and communication techniques It was identified that extension service delivery had bureaucratic problem which distorted timely information release and therefore recommended privatization of the organization. Educated people should be encouraged to be involved in both farming activities and local leadership. Finally local leaders should be elected democratically.

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