

The Role of Agricultural Libraries in Literacy Education as a Prelude to Capacity Building among Rural Farmers in Nigeria

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Abstract Illiteracy among Nigerians, with its social and economic implications, has become a growing concern in recent years. National awareness of problems associated with limited literacy skills has led to legislation, beginning at the federal level, to fund new literacy programmes and expand existing programmes. Libraries and information centers are viewed as an important component of this massive educational effort, especially in the light of the fact that 75 percent of farmers in Nigeria are illiterate rural dwellers. A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in forms of tables and charts. The findings revealed that agricultural libraries have major roles to play in literacy education to rural farmers in order to build their capacity to produce technology based agricultural goods that will reverse the negative impact of agriculture on the Nigerian economy. Results also showed that rural farmers had farm related information needs, peculiar information sources, and the agricultural information gathered by farmers were used to meet production related needs. The role agricultural libraries can play in literacy education of rural farmers in Nigeria were enunciated to include providing information to the extension workers and repackaging agricultural information for the rural farmers in local languages and dialects where necessary. Information Communication Technology developments within the library that can impact on the generation and dissemination of agricultural information to farmers included dissemination of information on posters, use of digital white boards for interactive extension workshops and dissemination of current digital agricultural information from the internet among others. In conclusion, the agricultural libraries have the human and material resources to join the extension team to conduct research and give rural farmer necessary information needed to provide to achieve technology based agriculture that will help the Nigerian nation achieve food sufficiency and security. It was recommended that Agricultural librarians should consider joining the agricultural extension team. The repackaging of agricultural information accessible to the library via online as well as the offline sources should be considered by the librarians in liaison with the agricultural experts. The agricultural librarians should spearhead the advocacy that will ensure the establishment of public libraries in all the local government areas in Abia state as this will ease the access to information to these rural farmers.

Keywords *Agricultural Libraries; Literacy Education; Capacity Building; Rural Farmers; Nigeria*

1. Introduction

Agricultural sector in Nigeria has not been sufficiently productive to have a positive impact on the country's economy, this may not be unrelated to the fact that majority of the farmers are illiterate rural farmers (Ozowa, 1995). Meanwhile extension service to rural farmers is in disarray, weak and showing signals that they cannot anchor anticipated transformation agenda of government unless there are reforms. This has led to the recommendation of active engagement of skilled extension personnel for sustainable agricultural transformation. The agricultural librarian as the custodian and disseminator of information is well placed to join the extension team to ensure that literacy education is given to rural farmers to ensure that they appropriate technology to produce sufficient food to feed the Abian population and also create employment for the teaming unemployed youth. The librarian can use the various media in the library as part of the educational effort to ensure that learning and informational opportunity made available to these farmers is taken advantage off (Weingand, 1996). More so, libraries have both informational and educational functions, and the extent and department. of each function will vary depending on the library's perception of its mission and its community's needs (Hehlen, 1996). The definition of its mission causes each library to react differently to the needs of its users.

2. Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to investigate the role of agricultural libraries in literacy education as a prelude to capacity building among rural farmers in Nigeria

Specifically, it will discover the following:

- a. Discover farm related information needs of rural farmers;
- b. Examine the information sources of rural farmers in Abia state;
- c. Discover the extent of use of the disseminated agricultural information by farmers;
- d. Discover the reason for non-adoption or part adoption of production recommendation;
- e. Establish the role of agricultural libraries can play in literacy education of rural farmers in Nigeria;
- f. Discover the level of ICT developments within the library of universities of agriculture and what are their impacts on the generation and dissemination of agricultural information among researchers and extension workers, whose duty are to offer extension service to rural farmers.

3. Methods

A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study.

- All Academic Librarians and library officers of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike and selected farmers from the 17 local government areas within Abia state, Nigeria where the university is domiciled and have extension services constituted the target population.
- Five farmers each were selected from each local government.
- The instrument for this study is Structured Interview schedule for the farmers and questionnaire for the librarians.
- The interview schedule was adapted from a Ph.D Thesis titled Evaluation of implementation of unified agricultural extension service in Abia and Akwa-Ibom states of Nigeria (Olajire, 2005) was the research instruments.
- A day each, usually the market day of area or a Sunday was used for the interview, in order to ensure the respondents are available.

- Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in forms of tables and charts.

4. Results

In all there were 85 farmer respondents and 22 librarians of academic and officer cadres. The response rate was 83 farmers and 22 librarians. Nine of the librarians were males while 13 were females. The farmers were 36 males and 47 females.

N=83

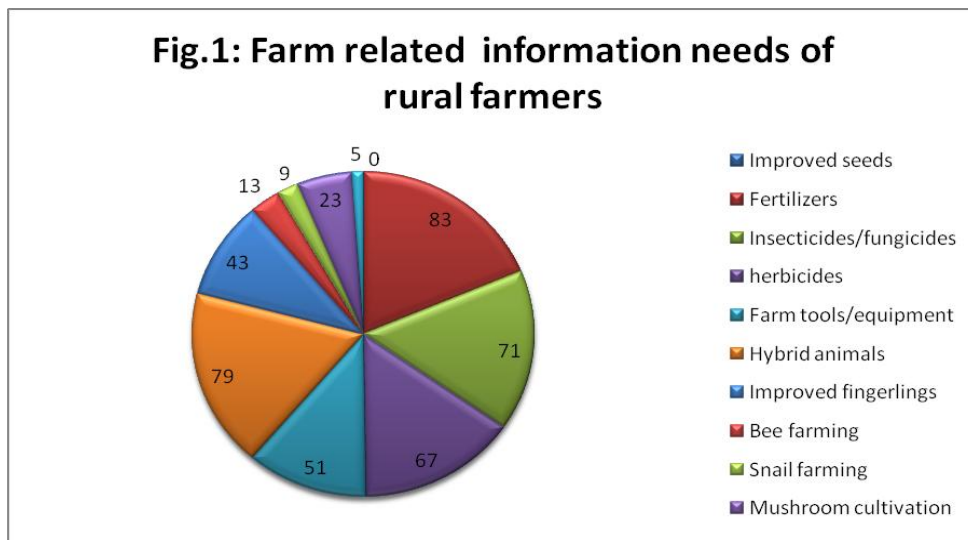


Figure 1: Farm related information needs of rural farmers

Farm related information needs of rural farmers were: Information on the fertilizers (83%), Insecticides/ fungicides (71%). Snail farming with was the least with 9% of the responders. Please Figure 1 for more details.

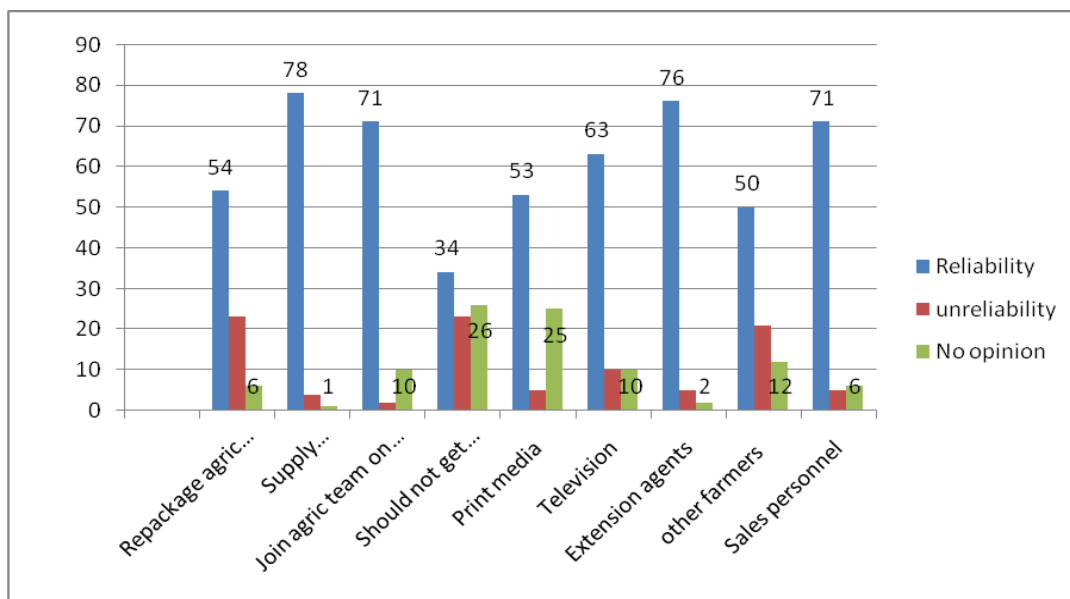


Figure 2: Rural farmers' sources of useful and reliable information

Rural farmers' sources of useful and reliable information include:

Rural farmers Sources of usefulness and reliable information include:

Relatives and friends(79), Extension agents(23), Radio(81) and television(56)

Print media(5personsie6.0%) other farmers(45) agricultural cooperatives (18) Sales person(29)

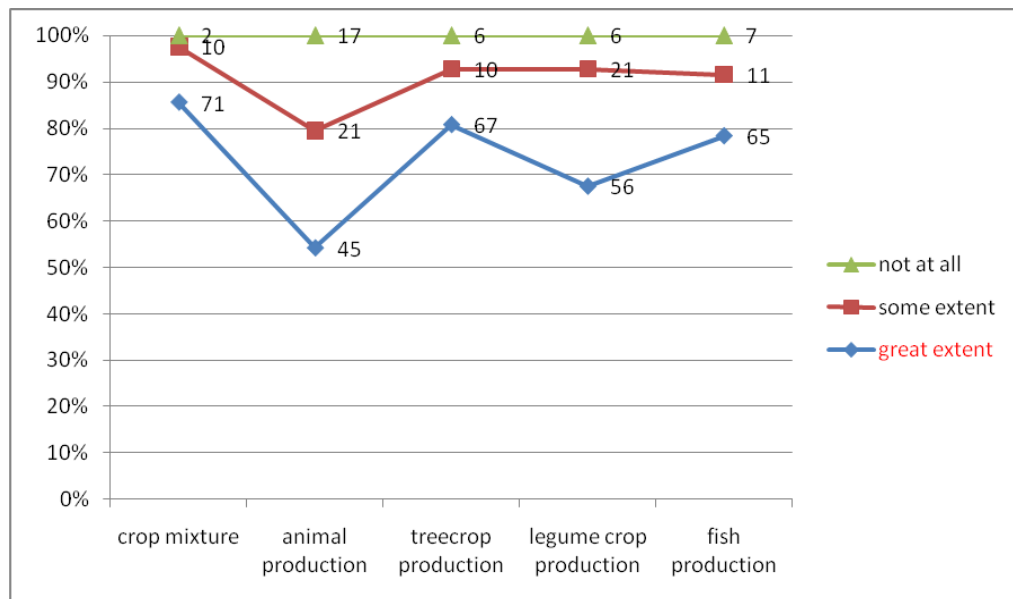


Figure 3: Source of information on production recommendation and extent of adoption

Source of information on production recommendation and extent of adoption revealed that crop mixture 71 respondents, while crop mixture had the greatest extent, while fish production had the least with 11 respondents.

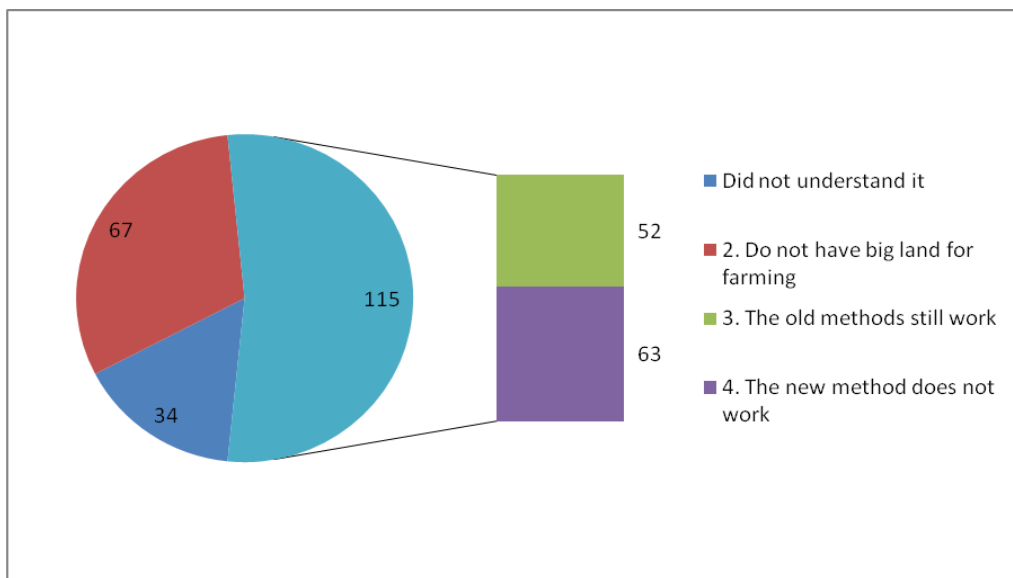


Figure 4: Reason for non-adoption of production recommendations

The reasons for non adoption of production recommendation included the following:

The farmers did not understand it (40%), they do not have big land for farming (80.7%), the old methods still work (62.7%), and the new method does not work (75.9%)

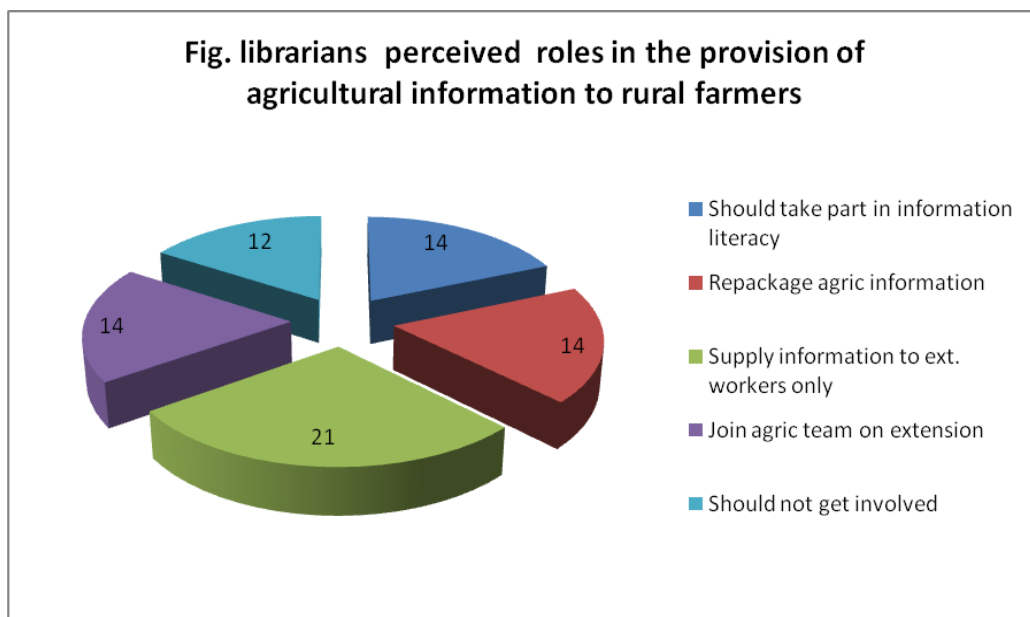


Figure 5: Source of information on production recommendation and extent of adoption

More than half of the librarians supported joining of the extension team by providing information to the extension worker and repackaging agricultural information for the rural farmer in local language if necessary.

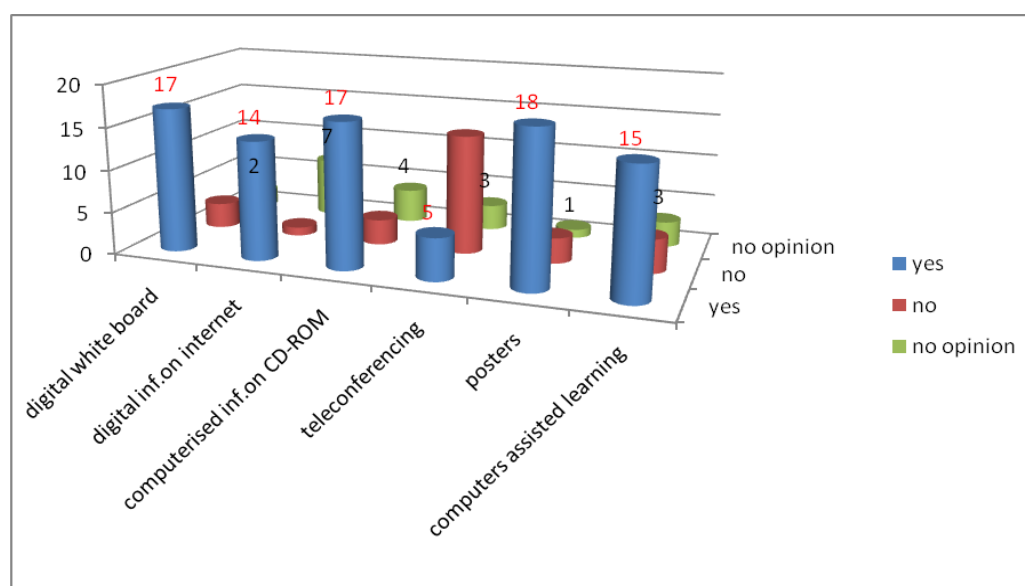


Figure 6: ICT developments within the library of the University of Agriculture and possible impact on the generation and dissemination of agricultural information to rural farmers

The ICT development within the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUUAU) agricultural- library is useful in the generation and dissemination of agricultural information to the rural farmers through use of

- ❖ Dissemination of information on posters sent to libraries from international organisation;
- ❖ Digital white board for workshops;
- ❖ Extracting computerised information of the CD-ROM;
- ❖ Teleconferencing was the least.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The agricultural libraries have major roles to play in literacy education of rural farmers in order to build their capacity to produce technology based agricultural goods that will reverse the negative impact of agriculture on the Nigerian economy.

Descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The findings showed that rural farmers had farm related information needs, peculiar information sources, and the agricultural information gathered by farmers were used to meet production related needs.

The role agricultural libraries can play in literacy education of rural farmers in Nigeria were enunciated to include providing information to the extension workers and repackaging agricultural information for the rural farmers in local languages and dialects where necessary (Nakazawa, 1993) Information Communication Technology developments within the library that can impact on the generation and dissemination of agricultural information to farmers included dissemination of information on posters, use of digital white boards for interactive extension workshops and dissemination of current digital agricultural information from the internet among others. This is in consonance with the findings of Edwin and Anie (2011) and Rathgeber (2000).

In conclusion, the agricultural libraries have the human and material resources to join the extension team to conduct research and give rural farmer necessary information needed to provide to achieve technology based agriculture that will help the Nigerian nation achieve food sufficiency and security. It is therefore recommended that:

- a) Agricultural librarians should consider joining the agricultural extension team;
- b) The repackaging of agricultural information accessible to the library via online as well as the offline sources should be considered by the librarians in liaison with the agricultural experts;
- c) The agricultural librarians should spearhead the advocacy that will ensure the establishment of public libraries in all the local government areas in Abia state as, this will ease the access to information to these rural farmers.

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