

## **An Evaluation of Agricultural Marketing Information System among Members of Farmers' Community-Based Organizations in Nigeria's Food Basket State**

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**Abstract:** This study was conducted to evaluate agricultural marketing information system among members of farmers' community-based organizations in Benue state. A total of 173 farmers were randomly selected and interviewed. The results showed that 86% of the respondents were within the age of 21 and 50 years. About 87% of the respondents fell within annual income of ₦54,000.00. In addition, 45% of the respondents joined their organization for multiple reasons of contributing to community development, socialization and receiving help in farm business whereas 23% joined for the sole aim of obtaining help in farm business. Many 49% of the respondents achieved their aim of contributing to community development. About 32% of the respondents received training for production only whereas 29% received both training and inputs through their organisations. Some 35% of the respondents sought information on storage and sales of produce. While 31% of the respondents shared information on production, processing, storage and sales. Friends, family and neighbours were the most useful sources of agricultural marketing information in the area.

**Key words:** Agricultural marketing information, community-based organizations, Benue state, farm business, food basket, Nigeria

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian agricultural trade policy ensures food security, promotes domestic trade, enhances access to agricultural raw materials and encourages participation in preferential trade arrangement as well as promotes the use of modern technology and promotion of quality agricultural exports. However, a large number of marketing functions in Nigeria are poor thus, limiting the responsiveness of marketing processes. Given the role marketing and distribution play in the overall farm enterprise in terms of income generation and sustainability of enterpriser, poor marketing activities pose a sever limitation to the growth of the agricultural sector and a huge constraint in food and income chains of rural Nigerians. Olukosi *et al.* (2005) and Demiryurek *et al.* (2008) identified the need for agricultural marketing information as a major tool for farmers to make economic decisions that would benefit them and thus, enhance their market access. To them, marketing has a connection to immediate income and is dependent on useful information and knowledge which enables the farmers make decisions on what to produce where and when to purchase inputs, availability of transportation and how to dispose of produce. One of the major constraints that farmers in

Benue state have is poor access to market information. Umeh (2000) explained that poor information flow (market intelligence) among others is a major contributor to the increasing merchandising risks of farmers. According to Obregon and Rivera (2001), poor communication processes increase the economic and socio-cultural deterioration of developing nations as a result of imbalance in information flow worldwide. Obinne (1992) stated that effective communication starts with the target population or at the level of the producers. However, despite the various studies carried out in the marketing of agricultural produce, no study has been conducted on agricultural marketing information system among farmers particularly those in community-based organisation in Benue state.

### **The objectives of the study:**

- Determine the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers in community-based organisation
- Describe the kinds of agricultural marketing information farmers seek and share
- Determine the sources of marketing information available to members of community-based organisation in the area

- Describe the factors that limit farmers’ access to agricultural information

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Benue state is the study area for this research and the major occupation of the people is agriculture. Crops like yam, water yam, cassava, sweet potato, rice, millet, guinea-corn, maize, groundnut, soyabean, sesame, fruits and vegetable are grown. However, other jobs like civil service, teaching, trading and craftsmanship are available. Members of farmers’ community-based constituted the population for this study. The population was drawn from the three agricultural zones of Benue state Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (BENARDA). Double-stage stratified and purpose simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. From each of the three agricultural zones, a farmers’ community-based organisation was chosen 1×3 = 3 community-based organisations. From each of the three organisations, a proportionate number of respondents 57+57+59 = 173 were interviewed. On the whole, the sample size of the study was 173 respondents.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 1 shows that 64% of the respondents were in the age range of 31-50 years. This population is middle-aged, active and constitute the workforce of the economy. These categories are more probable to adopt new innovations when introduced. The general assumption is that people in the middle age bracket innovation. These community-based organisations were appropriately directed at farmers who should exhibit capacity and keen interest to acquire new skill for economic enhancement and improved livelihood. Majority (89%) of the respondents were married with large household’s size of 6-10 members to cater for. The large household size could be reasons of labour needs on the farm and marketing of agricultural produce. About 75% of the respondents received 6-11 years of formal education. This implies that the farmers were fairly literate and appreciate the importance of knowledge in agricultural business. The study revealed that the majority (87%) of the respondents earned an annual income of less or equal to ₦54,000.00 only. This is an indication that farming and marketing are still at the subsistence level.

Table 2 shows that farmers, joined their various community-based organisations to meet both social and business needs. About 45% joined for multiple purposes of contributing to community development, socializing (belongingness) and business. However, 49% realized

Table 1: Distribution of the socio-economic characteristics of respondents (n = 173)

Socio-economic characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
≤21	7	4.0
21-30	39	22.5
31-40	63	36.4
41-50	47	27.2
51-60	13	7.5
61-70	4	2.3
Subtotal	173	99.9
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	94	54.3
Female	79	45.7
Subtotal	173	100.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	19	11.0
Married	154	89.0
Subtotal	173	100.0
<b>Household size</b>		
<6	68	39.3
6-10	71	41.0
11-15	25	14.5
16-20	3	1.7
21-25	3	1.7
26-30	2	1.2
36-40	1	0.6
<b>Level of education</b>		
No formal education	20	11.2
Primary	74	42.8
Secondary	55	31.8
ND/NCE	14	8.2
HND/degree	10	5.8
<b>Primary occupation</b>		
Farming	155	89.6
Civil service	16	9.3
Trading	2	1.2
<b>*Annual income from farming (₦)</b>		
≤54,000.00	151	87.3
>54,000.00	22	12.7
Subtotal	173	100.0

their expectation of contributing to community development. Farmers organize themselves in various community-based organizations to meet their various needs. The Maslow’s need Hierarchy theory suggests that human beings have needs which are basic and these needs are at different levels of importance depending on the individual’s current level of satisfaction. According to Hicks and Gullet (1976), these needs appear in the following order of hierarchy: survival, safety, belongings, ego status and self-actualization.

Table 3 shows agricultural marketing information seeking and sharing among farmers. Many 35% of the respondents sought information on storage and sales of agricultural produce. This implies that attention may be shifting from production to other aspects of agricultural marketing and emphasis on storage and sales of produce. It could be explained that every producer wants to sell the fruits of his labour at a fair price and be paid quickly to enable him buy seeds and fertilizer for the next season. The shift from production to storage and sales could be

Table 2: Distribution of farmers according to the realization of their expectations from community-based organization

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Purpose for joining CBO</b>		
A: To be respected in the community	0	0.0
B: To contribute to community	22	12.7
C: Socializing	13	7.5
D: Friends and relations are members	1	0.6
E: To receive help in my farming business	39	22.5
F: A and B	10	5.9
G: A, B and C	3	1.7
H: B, C and E	77	44.5
I: No response	8	4.6
Subtotal	173	100.0
<b>Realisation of purpose for CBO</b>		
A: To be respected in the community	1	0.6
B: Contribution to Community development	84	48.6
C: Self-social improvement	8	4.6
D: Received help for farming business	27	15.6
E: A and B	1	10.6
F: A, B and C	9	5.2
G: B, C and D	40	23.1
H: No response	3	1.7
Subtotal	173	100.0
<b>Form of assistance received from CBO for farm business</b>		
Training for production	55	31.8
Input acquisition	24	13.9
Loan	34	19.7
Farm work	10	5.8
Training and input acquisition	50	28.8
Subtotal	173	100.0
Multiple responses recorded		

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents according to agricultural marketing information they seek and share

Information	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Information sought for</b>		
Production	18	10.4
Storage and sales	60	34.7
Production, processing, storage and sales	39	22.5
Storage	9	5.2
Sales	34	19.7
Processing	13	7.5
Subtotal	173	100.0
<b>Information shared</b>		
No response	5	2.9
Production	21	12.1
Production, processing, storage and sales	53	30.6
Processing	29	16.8
Storage	35	20.2
Sales	30	17.3
Subtotal	173	100.0
Multiple responses recorded		

further explained to decline interest in cultivation as a result of low prices at harvest periods. Table 4 shows that farmers have multiple sources of agricultural marketing information and they patronize the sources that are most useful for their marketing purposes. About 38% of the respondents found friends, family and neighbours as most useful sources of agricultural marketing information. About 21% found friends, neighbours and extension agents as the second most important source of marketing information. It could be explained, therefore that informal sources of market information are prevalent in the area. It

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents according to their sources of agricultural marketing information (n = 173)

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
<b>General sources</b>		
Friends, family and neighbours	66.0	38.1
Distant clients	29.0	16.8
Media	6.0	3.5
Farmer organization meeting	15.0	8.7
Baranda	17.0	9.8
Church/Mosque	3.0	1.7
Friends, neighbours and extension agents	37.0	21.4
Total	173.0	100.0
Multiple responses recorded		

Table 5: Factors that limit farmers' access to agricultural marketing information (n = 173)

Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Sickness	23	13.3
Baranda	55	31.8
Poor access to literature	1	0.6
Long distance from source of information	17	9.8
Radio/TV	18	10.4
Poor access to communication network	20	11.6
Insufficient local knowledge	39	22.5
Total	173	100.0

is believed that the problems of rural farmers may no longer be the availability of credit but rather that of accessibility. Accessibility to subsidized cash and in-kind loans such as low interest rates, fertilizers, improved seeds, processing and marketing of agricultural produce.

The role of the state in providing widespread information and awareness on how to access these packages and the benefits to farmers and market participants is very critical (Magnus and Omanukwue, 2009). This can be done through the integrating and dissemination of information related to agricultural activities through the use of state radio stations, organization of group training sessions as well as the use of community-based organizations.

There should be increased linkages and feedback process between the rural farmers and the state; greater access to information about rural finance schemes and their potential benefits to rural business can boast the take up of loans (cash or in-kind).

Table 5 shows that baranda (middlemen), sickness and insufficient local knowledge constitute a major hindrance to farmers' access to useful agricultural marketing information.

In the case of baranda, it could be inferred that marketing intermediaries take advantage of the poor bargaining power and poor economic condition of the farmers thus cheating them in different ways.

This further emphasizes the undermining capability of baranda to farmers' market access which is strengthened by the inability of the farmers to participate collectively as a body in the market place. Furthermore, the challenge

facing the farmer could be compounded by sickness which acts to isolate the farmer and thus, expose him to more intense exploitation by the baranda.

### **CONCLUSION**

Farm decisions require adequate information on a number of things including where when and what price to purchase farm inputs, availability of transportation and how to dispose of the agricultural produce until it gets to the consumer. Farming is business and a source of livelihood especially for the rural farmer who has limited access to alternative options for self-sustenance. Farmers' capacity to control their environment for maximum income from produce is the result of resources of the disposal including knowledge i.e., marketing information and skills. Farmers' organisations were not indicated as important source of agricultural marketing information to members, rather they were proactive in their community development delivery and communal access to training and input for agricultural production. However, members access the market individually as they expressed negative attitude to joint trading.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are suggested:

- The capacity of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) be strengthened in sourcing agricultural marketing information for their members. This will help farmers develop trust and confidence in their local organisations for economic progress
- Non-governmental organisation and/or the government should set up an institution that would with message content that has local acceptance and

farmers' resource centre at strategic locations where farmers can access accurate agricultural information

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