

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Assessment of The Awareness and Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among Small Scale Farmers in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT:

The study assessed the awareness and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) among small scale farmers in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Seventy-five (75) farmers were sampled and interviewed using the random sampling technique. The results showed that majority of the farmers (74.6%) were between (31-60) years of age. Most of the respondents (80%) were males and (80%) of them are educated. The result showed that all the respondents are aware of the use of Radio and Television as a means of communicating agricultural information. Based on usage of ICTs, Radio recorded the highest usage (40%) followed by mobile phone (33.3%), print Media (10.0%), Television (8.0%) and lastly computer/internet (5.3%). The result also indicated that lack of constant power supply (with mean score of (3.89). High cost of ICTs (with mean score of 3.72), complexity of ICTS (With mean score of 3.64), and lack of credit and loan to obtain ICTS (with mean score of 3.56) were the major constraints to ICTs utilization by small scale farmers in the study area. It was therefore recommended that extension agents should encourage farmers on the use of the various ICT devices. Government should provide infrastructures like electricity and internet services in the rural areas to enable farmers make use of some necessary ICT devices. Government should also partner with relevant non-governmental organizations in order to provide the ICTs devices at subsidized and affordable rate to farmers.

Keywords: Awareness, Use, Information, Technology, Farmers.

INTRODUCTION

Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) is an indispensable tool for information dissemination that cuts across every field of knowledge. Information communication Technologies (ICTs) have changed the lives of individuals, organization and indeed the entire nation, no country and communities can be left untouched by "information society". The

value of information can never be under estimated because it is use for decision making. Information can be said to be figures, facts, graph and images that are processed and organized into meaningful form. It can be said to be message from a sender to one or more receivers (Claude 1998). Information has been identified as one resources required for the improvement of Agricultural production. Communication is the process of imparting

or exchanging information. It consists of passing information or scientific results to the largest number of people in the shortest possible time and at the minimum costs (Maurice, 2008). Dauda *et al.* (2010) opined that communication is critical to finding solutions to problems of food production through facilitating researcher-farmer linkage using ICTs. Technologies is the application of scientific knowledge to the practical aims of human life, or as it's sometimes phrased to be the change and manipulation of human environment, the development overtime of systematic techniques for making and doing things. The term "Information and Communication Technologies" (ICTs) can be broadly interpreted as the scientific, technological and engineering discipline and the management technologies used in the handling of information, processing and application related to computers (Osuagwu, 2001). ICTs can also be seen as technologies that facilitate communication, processing and transmission of information by electronic means. This definition covers the full range of ICTs from Radio, Television, Telephones, and Computers (CTA 2003). Adejoh and Haruna (2010) classified ICT into conventional ICT (radio, Television) and contemporary ICT (Telephones, Computer/Internet). The type of ICT Devices available in the study area include Radio, Television, Mobile phone/GSM, Computer/internet and Print media. The importance of ICT to small scale farmers is numerous. ICTs are the foundation of the new global information based economy (Okwusi *et al.*, 2009). In Nigeria, the government in recognition of the importance of ICT in Agricultural activities, established policies and projects in this regard; among which are: liberalization

and privatization policies to encourage private sectors participation and attraction of foreign investment which consequently reduces the price of computers and other ICT equipment, making them more accessible. There was also the launching, of the Global system of Mobile (G.S.M) communication, making phone lines more accessible nationwide and establishment of internet cyber cafes in most part of the country (both rural and urban areas), though the rates are still low and service unsteady (SGF, 2002). Very important also was the establishment of information and communication support (ICS-Nigeria) in 2002, for Agricultural growth (Oladimeji, *et al.*, 2004). This project though still on pilot phase in 8 states of the country is aimed at establishing resource Centre in rural areas, which makes information available to farmers and farm assistance organizations (ADPs, NGOs, Researchers, NAERLS etc.) at different Centre's and farm levels, as well as modernizing their information base through the use of telephone, radio, television, compact disk read only memory (CD-ROM), the internet etc. (Arokoyo, 2007). The Federal Government in 2012 introduced the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (GES), this was designed to deliver government subsidized farm inputs directly to farmers via GSM phones. GES scheme will be powered by eWallet, an electronic distribution channel which provides an efficient and transparent system for the purchase and distribution of Agricultural inputs based on a voucher system. The scheme guarantees registered farmers eWallet vouchers with which they can redeem fertilizers, seeds and other agricultural inputs from agro-dealers at half the cost, the other half being borne by the federal government and state government in equal proportions.

According to the Ezeh (2013), the project will link farmers directly to government and vice-versa so that government will be able to monitor the progress of farmers as well as disseminate valuable information to them. Apart from facilitating the acquisition and absorption of information/knowledge networking, codification, teleporting and science system. ICT could be used to access global knowledge and communication with other people. In Nigeria, empirical studies on ICT adoption suggest that factors such as socio-economic characteristics of farmers, access to credit or cash resources and information from extension and other media influence adoption rate of new Agricultural technology among farmers (Ayinde *et al.*, 2010; Idrisa *et al.*, 2012). Significant effort has been expended in the past decade to increase the use of ICT in Agriculture, especially with the aim of improving the economic status of small scale farmers in developing nations. (Singh, 2001). However, reports seem to point to similar challenges that hinder the use and adoption of ICT. According to Raju *et al.* (2001), Sadaf *et al.* (2005) and FAO (2001) stated some factors militating against the use of ICTs by farmers are as follows: Lack of ICT Knowledge, Lack of Access to ICT, High Cost of ICT, No Interest in ICT Usage, Lack of Constant Power Supply, No Support from Government, Lack of credit facilities. According to Aleke (2011) there are some factors militating against their effective utilization for sustainable development. Some of the factors are poor funding, management problems, illiteracy and lack of technical knowhow, low level of technology penetration, non-viable ICTs policy, and weak economy amongst others. The acquisition and maintenance of ICTs require adequate funding.

Unfortunately; Africa continent has not been able to earmark enough funds for ICTs. This is not surprising because of her weak economy which makes her appeal for different kinds of aids from developed countries. This explains why Mbachu (2003) wrote that "since the development of technology and its effective application are both function of a given society's level of economy and social development, the ability of the Nigerian (African) mass media to absorb and deploy recent advances in technology has been hampered by the country's(continent) continuing underdevelopment .The newly emerging trends regarding ICTs globally, indicate that ICTs deployment and development in Africa will increasingly be left behind unless the continent breaks the chain of corruption and economic stagnation and achieves a higher level of development that guarantee its people a higher standard of living that will be a strong stimulus for production and consumption of ICTs. In Ondo State, there are visible bodies of evidence which show that the area is not left out, in the struggle to harness the full potentials of the ICT in this information age. However, what may be of paramount importance may not just be the existence of these facilities but how much awareness do the farmers have about these facilities and how accessible are they to the change agents and farmers in particular. Equally relevant, is knowledge of the level of disposition of the farmers to the utilization of information and communication technologies in carrying out their farming activities. Presently, it is still quite unclear whether farmers in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State Nigeria, are adequately exposed to information and communication technology as a means of communicating agricultural

information. In view of this therefore, it has become imperative to investigate the level of awareness and usage of ICT Facilities /tools among farmers in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State Nigeria. It has come to be accepted that Agricultural development in Nigeria depend upon the small scale farmers who form bulk of the farming community and for Agriculture to really develop, these small - scale - farmers must know and understand what constitute progress in Agriculture. This has really hinder farmers use of information and communication technology in the study area. The extent to which these farmers progress depends largely upon their access to accurate and reliable information, the type of information they use to solve their problems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Akure North Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. It is located between latitude 5°45' and 8°15'N and longitude 4°45' and 6°E and share boundaries with Ikere Local Government Area of Ekiti State in the North, Ifedore Local Government in the west, Owo Local Government Area in the East and Akure South Local Government in the south. It spreads over an area of about 15,911 square kilometers with a population of about 185,596 inhabitants (NPC, 2006). A multi stage random sampling was used to arrive at the total number of respondents to be used for the study. First, five (5) wards were randomly selected, and then five communities were randomly selected from the five wards. The communities are Oba-Ile, Aiyede-Ogbese, Iju, Itaogbolu, Owode. Fifteen respondents each was then randomly

chosen from each of the five communities selected and a total of seventy-five respondents were used for the study. Data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire.

The data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as table, percentages and mean score from a five point likert scale.

Model Specification

Likert Scale was developed to measure mean score variables, it is a five-point scale and their statements are weighed as follows:

| Opinion | Point |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| Strongly Agreed (SA) | 5 |
| Agreed (A) | 4 |
| Undecided (U) | 3 |
| Disagreed (D) | 2 |
| Strongly Disagreed (SD) | 1 |

The mean response to each item was calculated using the following formula:

$$Y = \frac{\sum FX}{N}$$

Where

Y = Mean Response

Σ = Summation

F = Numbers of Respondents choosing a particular scale point

X = Numerical Value of the scale point

N = Total number of respondents to the item

The mean response to each item was interpreted using the concept of real limits of numbers. The real limit is given below and the numerical values of the scale points (Response modes) are as follows:

| | |
|--------------------|----------|
| Strongly Agreed | 4.5-5.49 |
| Agree | 3.5-4.49 |
| Undecided | 2.5-3.49 |
| Disagreed | 1.5-2.49 |
| Strongly Disagreed | 0.5-1.49 |

Decision Rule

The average mean score = 3.5, therefore any constraint above the average mean score is considered as major problem.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents

Majority of the farmers (74.6%) were between the age group of 31-60 years of age as shown in Table 1. This implies that large fraction of Respondents still falls between the productive age group. The frequency distribution of the Respondents according to gender as presented in Table 1 indicates that most (80%) of the respondents were males and the females constituted (20%). This implies that majority of the farmers in the study area were male. The result is in line with Richardson (2001) who asserted that males participate more in Agricultural activities than females. The result of Marital Status of the respondents as presented in Table 1 shows that majority (61.3%) of the farmers were married while, 24.0% are single, 8.0% are widow, 4.0% are divorced and 2.7% are widower. This shows that significant number of farmers in the study area had family responsibilities to take care of. The result of Educational level of the Respondents in Table 1 showed that 20% of the farmers have no formal education while 26.7% only had primary education, 22.6% had tertiary education while

significant number of the farmers (30.7%) had secondary education. This shows majority of the farmers can read and write and should be able to adopt new innovation and use information and communication technologies. Hornik (1999) noted that basic education whether obtained in school or out of school contributes significantly to productivity, due to the fact that better educated farmers are more receptive and had more access to external information than others who are not educated. The frequency distribution according to the Farm size of the farmers as presented on Table 1 also indicated that majority (52.0%) of the farmers have farm size ranging from 1-2 hectares, 34.7% had between 3-4 hectares, 8% have less than 1 hectare, while 5.3% have between 5-6 hectares since small scale farmers were considered on the basis of this study, significant numbers of the respondents were small scale famers. Results in Table 1 also revealed that majority of the farmers (48%) have farming experience ranging between 1 to 10 years, while only 5.3% to have farming experience between 31 to 40 years. This implies that significant number of respondents had more farming experience. The average farming experience in the study area is 15 years. The extensive farming experience will help small scale farmers achieve greater productivity, as well as sustain Agriculture (Ajani *et al* 2012).

Availability and Awareness of Various ICT Devices available in the study Area

The results of the availability and awareness of ICT devices that are available in the study area presented on Table 2. The result showed that 100% of the respondents indicated the availability of

the radio in the study area, 98.7% of the respondents indicated that Television, 100% of the respondents indicated that mobile phone, 50.7% of the respondent signified the availability of internet network and computer, 73.3% of the respondents indicated the availability of Print Media like Newspapers and pamphlets. According to Helen *et al* (2008), the availability of media sources does not necessarily mean its accessibility. Hence the need to access the level of usage of ICTs by farmers in the rural area arises. According to Table 2 all the respondents (100%) are aware of Radio and Television as an ICT device for obtaining agricultural information. About 85% of the respondents were aware of Mobile Phone as a source through which Agricultural information can be obtained. Also, 74.7% of the respondents were aware that Computer/internet is a medium through which Agricultural information can be communicated. About 83% were aware of Print Media (Newspapers, Journals, Pamphlets, Agricultural handbooks) as a source of obtaining Agricultural information.

Level of Usage and Regularity of various ICTs to obtain Agricultural information.

Table 3 shows that significant number (40%) of the respondents uses Radio regularly, 37% of the respondents use it occasionally, 25.3% use it rarely while only 6.7% never use Radio to obtain Agricultural information. For Television, most respondents (8%) regularly used it, 6% occasionally used it while 26.7% rarely used it. For mobile phone /G.S.M, majority of the respondents (33%) regularly used it to obtain Agricultural information, 32% occasionally used it, and 20% rarely used it while 20% never used the phone for

Agricultural information. For computer/Internet usage, majority of the respondents (69.3%) never used it to obtain Agricultural information, 5.3% regularly used it, and 5.3% occasionally used it, while 16% rarely used it. Finally, for Print Media such as Agricultural journals, Pamphlets and Handbooks, 13.5% of the respondents regularly used it to obtain Agricultural information, 41% occasionally used it, and 14.7% rarely used it, while 25.3% never used it to obtain Agricultural information. Table 3 further showed the result based on the regularity in the usage of the ICTs listed by the farmers. Radio was ranked first since it was the most used ICT device with 40.0%. This is in agreement with Onuoha, *et al* (1999) who indicated that Radio is the most popular ICT facility used among rural farmers because it is considered as cheap source where useful Agricultural information can be communicated to large number of farmers at faster rate and relatively low cost. Mobile phone/ G.S.M was ranked second (33.3%). According to Fagbola (2008), farmers especially those in the rural area had the desire for mobile phones but associated problems like cost and lack of coverage had hindered the ready use of the device. Print Media was ranked third with 13.5% of the farmer who uses it, Television ranked fourth with 8.0% usage by the farmers. This is in agreement with Odoemelem and Olojede (2010) who indicated challenges such as lack of electricity, supply and lack of signal prevent farmers' especially rural farmers using Television for sourcing agricultural information. Lastly Computer/Internet was rated fifth which is the least used ICT device in the study area with 5.3%. This is in agreement with Ezeano *et al* (2008), who said that the use of internet and

computer is still in its infancy stage in developing countries due to limited infrastructures, illiteracy and high cost of access.

Problems militating against the use of ICT by Farmers

From the result obtained according to Table 5, the mean score from five point likert scale was used to ascertain the level of seriousness of the problems, any mean score from 3.5 is considered a serious problem while mean score below 3.5 is not a serious problem. Problem of lack of constant power supply was ranked 1st, had a mean score of 3.89, High cost of ICT ranked 2nd with a mean score of 3.72, Complexity of ICTs was ranked 3rd with mean score of 3.64, Lack of awareness (4th) had a mean score of 3.62, while Lack of credit and loan to obtain ICTs (5th) had a mean score of 3.56. The problems indicated are all considered a serious problem (with a mean score above average) militating against the use of ICTs by farmers.

This is in agreement with Fasina (2009) who asserted that constraints such as Lack of constant supply of electricity, high cost of ICT, lack of operational knowledge affect the use of ICTs devices as a sources of Agricultural information. No support from the Government (ranked 6th) with a mean score of 3.41 and Lack of Formal education (ranked 7th) with a mean score of 3.37 were not regarded as a serious problem militating against the use of ICTs by farmers in the study area.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this finding showed that power supply is very important to aid the

farmers' use of various information and communication technologies, also educating the farmers on how the various ICT device can be used to obtain Agricultural information. If the farmers are educated, it will aid effective and efficient use of information and communication technologies by so doing the problem of complexity of some ICT device will be tackled.

Based on the outcome of this finding, the following recommendations are made;

- I. Extension agents should encourage farmers on the use of the various ICT devices
- II. Government should provide Infrastructures like electricity, Internet services in the rural areas to enable farmers make use of some necessary ICT devices.
- III. Government should partner with relevant nongovernmental organizations in order to provide all the ICTs devices at subsidized and affordable rate for farmers.

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Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of the Respondents

| Socio-Economic Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | | |
| 21-30 | 15 | 20.0 |
| 31-40 | 18 | 24.0 |
| 41-50 | 28 | 37.3 |
| 51-60 | 10 | 13.3 |
| 61-70 | 04 | 5.3 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |
| Sex | | |
| Male | 60 | 80 |
| Female | 15 | 20 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |
| Marital Status | | |
| Single | 18 | 24 |
| Married | 46 | 61.3 |
| Divorced | 3 | 4.0 |
| Widow | 6 | 8.0 |
| Widower | 1 | 1.0 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |
| Level of Education | | |
| No formal education | 15 | 20.0 |
| Primary Education | 20 | 26.7 |
| Secondary Education | 23 | 30.7 |
| Tertiary Education | 17 | 22.6 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |
| Farm Size | | |
| Less than 1 | 6 | 8.0 |
| 1-2 | 39 | 52.0 |
| 3-4 | 26 | 34.7 |
| 5-6 | 4 | 5.3 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |
| Farming experience | | |
| 1-10 | 5 | 6.7 |
| 11-20 | 30 | 40.0 |
| 21-30 | 36 | 48.0 |
| 31-40 | 4 | 5.3 |
| Total | 75 | 100 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 2: Availability and Awareness of various ICTs in the Study Area

| ICTs | Available | Percentage | Aware | Percentage |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|-------|------------|
| Radio | 75 | 100 | 75 | 100 |
| Television | 74 | 98.7 | 75 | 100 |
| Mobile phone/G.S.M | 75 | 100 | 64 | 85.3 |
| Computer/Internet | 38 | 50.7 | 56 | 74.7 |
| Print Media | 55 | 73.3 | 62 | 82.7 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Table 3: Level of Usage of various ICTs in Agricultural Information

| ICT | Regularly (Everyday) | Occasionally (Once in a week) | Rarely (Once in a month) | Never | Rank |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|------|
| Radio | 30(40)* | 23(37.3)* | 19(25.3) | 5(6.7) | 1 |
| Mobile phone/G.S.M | 25(33.3) | 21(32.0) | 15(20) | 15(20.0) | 2 |
| Print Media | 10(13.5) | 31(41.3) | 11(14.7) | 19(25.3) | 3 |
| Television | 6(8.0) | 45(60) | 20(26.7) | 0(0.0) | 4 |
| Computer/Internet | 4(5.3) | 4(5.3) | 12(16.0) | 52(69.3) | 5 |

Source: Field Survey, 2014

*Values in parenthesis are percentages and it also indicates the highest frequency

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents based on the Problems militating against the use of ICTs

| Problems | SA | A | U | D | SD | Mean | RANK |
|--|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-------|-----------------|
| Lack of constant supply | 14(18.7) | 39(52.0) | 22(29.3) | 0(0.0) | 0(0.0) | 3.89* | 1 st |
| High cost of ICT | 26(34.7) | 23(30.7) | 12(16.0) | 8(10.7) | 5(6.7) | 3.72* | 2 nd |
| Complexity of ICTs | 6(8.0) | 36(48.0) | 33(44.0) | 0(0.0) | 0(0.0) | 3.64* | 3 rd |
| Lack of Awareness | 8(10.7) | 49(65.3) | 9(12.0) | 0(0.0) | 9(12.0) | 3.62* | 4 th |
| Lack of credit and loan to Obtain ICTs | 5(6.7) | 32(42.7) | 38(50.7) | 0(0.0) | 0(0.0) | 3.56* | 5 th |
| No support from Government | 11(14.7) | 28(37.3) | 17(22.7) | 19(25.3) | 19(25.3) | 3.41 | 6 th |
| Lack of Formal Education | 8(10.7) | 24(32.0) | 36(48.0) | 2(2.7) | 5(6.7) | 3.37 | 7 th |

Source: Field survey, 2014

**Values in parenthesis are percentage *mean Score above average = Serious problem