Non -agricultural information services provided by extension agents in Oyo state, Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper examined non -agricultural information services provided by extension agents in Oyo state, Nigeria. This is predicated on the fact that increasing responsibility of the responsiveness to rural needs has given extension services a broader concept and that and rural non-farm income account for considerable share of rural household income. A simple random sampling was used to select 100 extension agents from a population of 170. Data were collected from the respondents sampled for the study using interview schedule based on a structured questionnaire. The results show that majority (69.2%) are male, belonging to 40-45 years age group (54%), married (85%), Christians (60%), had BSc (65%), studying for higher degrees (48%) and with 6-10 years of working experience (57%). About 55% of the extension officers reside within the job location. They provide non-agricultural information on areas such as non-farm income generating activities, governance, legal, health and education. Significant determinants of provision of non-agricultural information by extension agents are age (t=2.33), gender (t=1.80), working experience (t= 2.06), residing within job location (t=2.29), and studying for higher degree (t=2.38). The study concludes by advocating that the extension messages should be formally expanded to cover the non-agricultural income generating activities in order to enhance the livelihoods of rural people engaged in it
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INTRODUCTION

Many times agricultural development is often assumed to mean rural development due to misconception because it is the principal occupation for people in rural areas (Ekong, 2003), however, a broader view had emerged which distinguish rural development form agricultural development. Rural development is equated with changes in social and economic structures, institution, relationships and processes, which implies that rural development is not agricultural and economic growth alone but as creation and fair sharing of social and economic benefits resulting from this growth (Wandschneider and Davis 2003). Rural development can be defined as a process by which a set of technical, social, cultural and institutional measures are implemented with the aim of improving the socio economic conditions in order to achieve harmony and balance both on regional and national levels (Ekong, 2003). Jibowo (1992) defined rural development as the transformation of rural community into a socially, economically politically, educationally, orderly and materially desirable condition with the purpose of improving the quality of life of the rural population.

Rural extension has played an important role in the promotion of agriculture as a motor for economic growth and continues to be an effective tool for helping thousands of families to improve their living conditions in terms of food safety and economic and social management. Extension services enable farmers to take up innovations, improve production, and protect the environment. Extension shows positive effects on knowledge, adoption, and productivity. With studies showing very high (13–500%) rates of return to extension, it is a cost-effective way to improve farmer productivity and income. Experiences with extension programmes show the positive impact that they have on productivity and farmer incomes (Davis, 2011, GFRAS, 2011).

Agricultural and social scientists from the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) have been in the forefront of recent work and debate on improving the efficacy of agricultural advisory services and innovation processes. They have contributed to the consensus that has recently emerged on a need for multi-faceted and multi-institutional agricultural extension and innovation systems that provide varied information services to rural peoples and share information among and between a range of stakeholders, including farmers themselves (Davis, and Heemskerk, 2012).

The meaning of the term 'extension' has changed over time (Swanson, 2008) and is moving away from the dominant emphasis on technology transfer towards a much broader concept that includes developing the skills and management capacities of farming families and the learning capacity of both farmers and extension organisations. Extension has been recently defined as "systems that

facilitate the access of farmers, their organizations and other market actors to knowledge, information and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agribusiness, and other relevant institutions; and assist them to develop their own technical, organizational and management skills and practices" (Christoplos, 2010).

The term rural advisory services is a product of the expanding and increasing responsibility of the responsiveness to rural needs has given extension services a broader concept and that and rural non-farm income account for considerable share of rural household income. Rural advisory services (RAS), also called extension, are all the different activities that provide the information and services needed and demanded by farmers and other actors in rural settings to assist them in developing their own technical, organisational, and management skills and practices so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being (Davis, 2011). Gallaher and Santopole (1967) were of the view that an extension agent is expected to play the following roles: (a) Analyst - interpreting situation for his clientele (b) Advocate-choosing the best method among alternatives (c) Advisor - making available alternatives to a given situation. (d) Innovator-creating new ideals to satisfy a particular need of client.

Orr and Orr (2002) reported that there is need for a greater understanding of the links between agriculture and non-farm income generating activities because these are common two livelihood strategies in rural areas that usually receive separate treatment in development literature and practice.

Rural households in Malawi, rather than specialize and maximize income, households were optimizing income by diversifying their livelihood strategies by combining minor cash crops with micro enterprise in order to increase their income security (Orr and Orr, 2002). The relationship between farm and non-farm activities was represented as a two-way matrix, which reflects the different options that households face in combining farm and non farm activities. The Y axis shows the level of income from agriculture (increasing concentration on commercial farming) while X axis shows the level of income from micro-enterprises (increasing concentration on business and diversification). It implies that households can move within the boxes designated as A to I vertically or diagonally in the matrix depending on their objectives.

Y

A 100%FARM INCOME	**B** STRONG FARM PRODUCTION SUPPLEMENTED BY NON FARM BUSINESS	**C** BALANCE BETWEEN FARM AND NON-FARM
D SMALL HOLDER AGRICULTURE WITH NO OR LITTLE BUSINESS	**E** MIXTURE OF SMALL SCALE AGRICULTURE	**F** MAIN BUSINESS SUPPLEME BY AGARICULTURAL PRODUCTION
G NO OR LITTLE LAND/ INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES	**H** VIABLE –STABLE NON-FARM BUSINESS	**I** 100% INCOME FROM FARM

X

Figure 1: Relationship and balance between farm and non-farm activities
Adapted from Orr and Orr 2002

Participation in non-agricultural sector allows poor people to smooth out or offset fluctuation in agricultural income that might occur on a seasonal basis. This is specially the case where savings, credit and insurance mechanisms are not available for this purpose, as is the case in many rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa. Farm household diversification into non-farm activities emerges naturally from diminishing or time-varying returns to labor or land, market failures, entry into high-return niches, *ex ante* risk management, and *ex post* coping with adverse shocks (Barrett, et al 2001).

There is a growing awareness of the importance that information plays in rural development. Therefore a holistic extension strategy aim at addressing poverty in rural areas, must shift

from an exclusive focus on agricultural production to a broader range of services relating to marketing, environmental conservation, poverty reduction, and off-farm activities(ARD 2002). Information is recognized as an essential component of the development process to empower poor communities, informal development agencies, policy makers and informing decision making process at every level. In rural areas, information provide responses to the need of people for knowledge to improve their productivity, incomes and welfare and to manage the natural resources on which they depend in a sustainable way. The effectiveness of an information system depends on the extent to which the system characteristics are in correspondence with the situation of the users and how much the potential user of the system is willing and able to make use of the services provided. Information needs are affected by information sources available, the uses to which the information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation and other individual characteristics of the users, as well as the social, political, economic, legal and regulatory systems surrounding the users and the consequences of information use (Ozowa, 1995). Rivera (2006) noted that as developing countries gradually rely less upon agriculture for rural income, rural economies require new solutions to access knowledge and information systems for rural development. Non-agricultural rural knowledge and information systems can play a significant role in developing and disseminating successful strategies to escape rural poverty. The objective of the study was to determine non -agricultural information services provided by extension agents in Oyo state, Nigeria. Specifically, the study investigated non-agricultural information needs, sources of non-agricultural information and determined non-agricultural information seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in the study area.

METHODS

The study was carried out in Oyo State, which is one of the six states in the South Western Nigeria. It is located between latitude 7°8′ and 9°10′ North and longitude 2°10′ and 4°35′East. It covers a total land mass of 27,249 square kilometer and shares boundaries with Kwara State in the North, Osun State in the East, Ogun State in the West. The average annual rainfall is 1220mm and the mean temperature is 27°C. The population of Oyo State according to 2006 population census is 5,591,589 (National Population Commission 2007). The economy of the state is based on agriculture and major occupation of the people is farming. The rural populace engage in other activities such as tailoring, teaching, barbing and hairdressing, carpentry, blacksmithing, and transport services operation among others. Oyo State is made up of thirty-three Local Government Area and divided into four Agricultural zones by the Oyo State Agricultural Development Programme (OYSADEP) namely: Ibadan/Ibarapa, Oyo and Ogbomosho Agricultural zones. All the extension agents in Oyo State ADP form the target population for this study. There are 170 extension agents in the Oyo state ADP with Ibadan/Ibarapa zone having 56 extension agents while saki zone has 42 extension agents, Oyo zone has 40 extension agents and Ogbomoso has 32 extension agents. A simple random sampling was used to select 100 extension agents from a population of 170. Data were collected through the use of structured questionnaire whose content comprised open and closed ended questions. The data were described with percentage distribution and multiple regression analysis was used to examine relationship between personal characteristics and provision of non- agricultural information by extension agents.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the description of respondents' demographic characteristics, Table 2 shows non -agricultural information services provided by extension agents and Table 3 highlights the multiple regression analysis of relationship between personal characteristics and provision of non- agricultural information by extension agents.

Table 1: Description of respondents' demographic characteristics

Demographic characteristics	Description
Age	About 54 percent are between 40 and 45 years
Gender	About 69 percent males
Marital status	85 percent married
Religion	About 60 percent Christians
Education	About 65 percent had BSc
Studying for higher degree	48 percent studying for higher degree
Residing within job location	55 percent reside within job location
Working experience	57 percent had working experience between 6 – 10 years

Table 2: Non -agricultural information services provided by extension agents

Areas nonagricultural information	Percentage
Income generating activities	
Weaving	63
Embroidery	63
Carving	64
Leather work	59
Health information	**64**
Family planning and child developm	65
HIV/AIDS prevention	64
Medical care	67
Vulnerability to STD infection	65
Prevention of Poliomyelitis	64
Health Insurance	64
Marketing/ Economic Information	
Procedure for credit Procurement	64
Cooperative management	58
Budgeting Method	65
Record Keeping	59
Investment	58
Entrepreneur ability	63
Social capital Information	
Group management	64
Group linkages	63
Use of social amenities	59
Group Dynamics	64
Educational Information	
Quality of school	64
Training	63
Adult literacy	63
Capacity building	62
Governance information	
Power structure	68
Decision making Process	63
Latitude of freedom	67
Fundamental human right	66
Followership role	63
Legal information	
Dispute resolution	69
Agreement procedure	62
Boundary maintenance	65
Government Regulation	62
Crime management	
Law enforcement	67
Maintaining order	63
Social conformity	68
Sanction of Reward Or Punishment	63

DISCUSSION

From table 1, majority (69.2%) are male, belonging to 40-45 years age group (54%), married (85%), Christians (60%), had BSc (65%), studying for higher degrees (48%) and with 6-10 years of working experience (57%). About 55% of the extension officers reside within the job location. In Table 2 extension officers provide non-agricultural information on areas such as non-farm income generating activities, governance, legal, health and education. High proportion of the extension officers indicated that they provide non-agricultural information.

Table 3, shows the results of multiple regression analysis of the relationships between personal characteristics and provision of non -agricultural information services by extension agents. The independent variables were significantly related to the provision of non -agricultural information services by extension agents. The F value of 10.53 at p=0.05 shows that there was strong correlation between the independent variable and provision of non -agricultural information services by extension agents. The significant determinants are age (t=2.33), gender (t=1.80), working experience (t= 2.06), residing within job location (t=2.29), and studying for higher degree (t=2.38). The findings as extension agents' age increases, study for higher degrees, reside within job locations and acquire long working experience the provision of non-agricultural information to rural dwellers increases. The R value is 0.72 while the R square is 0.51; this implies that the independent variables predict 77% of the dependent variable. From the results, this paper has shown that extension agents provide non-agricultural information to rural dwellers in response to their needs. Also conventional information sources can be improved upon to provide non-agricultural information as these were the sources prominently used by rural dwellers. There is need therefore to ensure that there is provision of information on the areas identified so that the livelihoods of the rural dwellers can be enhanced.

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Table 3: Multiple regression analysis of relationship between personal characteristics and provision of non-agricultural information by extension agents

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	97.44	13.35		7.30	0.00
Age	0.41	0.18	0.24	2.33	0.02
Gender	-13.69	7.57	-0.18	-1.80	0.07
Religion	6.27	4.94	0.12	1.26	0.21
Educational level	3.66	2.59	0.15	1.41	0.16
Marital status	5.83	4.43	0.13	1.31	0.19
Working experience	0.68	0.33	0.18	2.06	0.03
Residing within job location	6.72	2.94	0.25	2.29	0.01
Studying for higher degree	3.55	1.49	0.35	2.38	0.01
F	10.53				
p	0.00				
R	0.72				
R square	0.51				

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