

# INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF CASSAVA FARMERS IN UPATA CLAN, EKPEYE COMMUNITY OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*This study dealt on fresh cassava farmers in Ekpeye land of Rivers State, Nigeria. This study adopted a survey research design which cluster sampling technique was used to select 984 respondents on random basis from four clusters. Structured questionnaire was design for the collection of data. Three categories of farmers were identified in the study. They are peasants, commercial and cooperative farmers. The peasant farmers are mainly old and retiring group with little needs and information. The commercial farmers are individual prospective farmers. The cooperative farmers are those who agreed to contribute their efforts, money and resources for a common goal and objective. They are anxious to getting information about how, what and where to go for more knowledge and assistance. It was also observed that the farmers desiring information from colleagues, extension workers, agricultural institutions, news media and banks in order to sustain, organize and expand their efforts in profit making. It is the position of this study that if cassava farmers are given more information, they will surely do better. In this case, they should be given more education as this would benefit them.*

**Keywords:** *cassava farming, information, knowledge, Ekpeye land*

## INTRODUCTION

Cassava farming is the base for food security and many other business development in Africa. This is true not only to the farmer and his immediate community, but also to the nation. Apart from acting as food supplements, cassava are used as raw materials for the production of many industrial goods such as drugs, paper, gum and textile materials. It has been reported that cassava leaves provide about the same amount of protein as an egg (Rod, 2010). The crop can be turned into high-quality starch, cassava flour and animal feed component. Unfortunately, the production of this essential raw material is left in the hands of those who know little or nothing about the influence of information on the progress of the system. Government interest is on indigenous industrial outfit based on locally sourced raw material. The results of this study will portray the importance of this influential population of cassava farmers. This research will serve as an avenue through which industrialization and job creation can emerge. The part that information provision will play to advance

the production of this crop has been the focus of this study. This work is therefore set to examine information seeking behaviour of these farmers in the locality. This therefore necessitates investigation into method of information procurement by Ekpeye cassava farmers.

Information is quite indispensable to the progress of any business. The case of cassava farming is not different. Availability of adequate information is a tool that has the capacity to reduce uncertainty. Curras (1987) explains information as a tool that is able to give the opportunity to form judgments, opinions and make decisions. Available information placed at the door step of any cassava farmer will boost the output of the individual. Abel (1998) has emphasized that information is an economic resource for planning, decision making and control of activities in a business environment. To a progressive cassava farmer, information provides infrastructure that can capture, explore, control, harmonize and tame any situation to a local advantage. Kihara (2007) notes that through United Nations, eight African countries were awarded a total grant of US \$553,962 from Donor Agencies in an alliance for a 'Green Revolution' in Africa. Nigeria was among the countries that were required to pursue a rapid distribution of four cassava varieties that are resistant to Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD), a common disease that affects cassava plants. Such information could only be accessible to those that are exposed to sources and have made necessary contacts.

Itai (2006) gives a report of someone who migrated from cultivating maize to cultivate cassava and has reported that cassava production requires less effort. Such information could reposition farmers to where they could make more profit. Development in the Ekpeye area has not reached the level where these farmers could go further in processing their farm products. However these advantages have motivated many farmers to form themselves into cooperative associations with the sole objective of cultivating this crop. A major attraction in cassava farming is that it grows well in poor soils and low rainfall areas (IITA, 2003).

A report from International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in 2003 shows the information provided to farmers and traders sufficient awareness in Uganda. They receive information on daily market conditions which enable them transact their businesses of buying and selling of fresh cassava. The prevailing volatility of daily prices and the swiftness of the trade make timely information highly inevitable to cassava farmers and traders. Thus, farmers that do not have this information often prolong price negotiations with traders in an attempt to avoid being cheated. Conversely, uninformed traders cause prices to rise at the rural markets. This results to daily variations in price that can create price risk for both farmers and traders who cannot predict market prices when traders negotiate purchase prices with farmers. Discussing further on the activities of cooperatives, the Nigerian Cassava Growers Association exists as an umbrella group that supervises the activities of all cassava farmers. In fact, it is on record that this group has already attracted a loan facility of about two hundred million Naira (N200m) for its members across the country from

Nigerian Agricultural, Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB). Igidi (2009) emphasizes that the main aim of loan facilities is to make planting materials of high yields available to the farming families at every location. There is the existence of informal revolving credit facility among these cassava farmers. In this system each farmer contributes certain amount which they could have access to on rotational basis. These examples of innovation in fresh cassava farming and trading underline the dynamics of the system. The perishable nature of fresh cassava has not made room for delay in storage to the extent that the farmer is always eager to dispose of the product without delay. Trotter (1992) observes that in developing countries, food marketing chains to cities do not perform efficiently.

The basic marketing functions open to farmers is handling, transportation, storage, while processing, wholesaling and retailing are missing. This is the problem of wider seasonal variation in supplies and prices as well as making urban consumers pay more for food, while producers' prices remain low. These problems result in food insecurity and marginalization of production. Kleih (1999) observed that in 1980s, the CIAT research organization developed a storage technology that increased fresh cassava life span from 3 days to between 2 and 3 weeks, bagged in polythene soon after harvest. The high humidity reduces perish ability.

Fungal growth is controlled by dipping the roots in fungicide before bagging. Rod (2010) has also noted that caution must be taken in the selection and movement of cassava planting materials. Incorrect use of insecticides during storage and planting also has hazardous effect on the crop and humans. The use of Radio and TV media for popular information was also recommended. Onumah and Hubbard (1999) observe that fresh cassava trading is dynamic and highly streamlined. It is driven by the perish ability of cassava roots, which demands swift movement from the farm to the consumer. Traders are therefore forced to discount their prices heavily if the cassava reaches the market late after harvest. Having this in mind, farmers are pressurized to negotiate prices with traveling traders within a limited period. The control and development of steady markets can only be achieved by close consultation between urban authorities and traders.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Ekpeye Community is located in Rivers State of Nigeria. The main occupation of the natives is farming of cassava root crop. The methods and skills used in this activity are usually acquired through informal education. It is often passed on to children from parents on the basis of long term experience. Any information and methods for a change of this attitude is sometimes usually met with mixed feelings. The Ekpeye community engages in cultivating other crops like yam, plantain, various types of vegetables, palm trees, and even fishing. In the entire Rivers State, the Ekpeye Community is about the fourth largest group of cassava producers (NBS, 2006). This position is, however, challenged by so many problems related to development and sustainability as a result of civilization. This study adopted a survey

research design. Structured questionnaire was design as the instrument for data collection and was supplemented by personal interview.

The population of this study the villages in Upata Clan in Ekpeye community of Rivers State, Nigeria. The Upata clan is where this study was based. According to the 2006 census population figure in Nigeria, only about 40,000 of the inhabitants in this locality are farmers. The Upata clan where this study was based has a population of about 10,000 farmers who are involved in cultivating several types of cash crops. About 10% of these farmers are involved in cassava production. 1000 copies of questionnaire were administered on the respondents while 984 copies were recovered and used for analysis. Agricultural extension workers were used as the research assistants. The questionnaire is divided into two parts. Part one deals with demographic information. The other part examines the information seeking behaviour of the respondents. Data collected for the study were subjected to analysis using frequency count and simple percentage.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results on the demographic information indicate that majority of the respondents are from the middle class, that is to say between the age bracket of 30 and 40 years. About 24% of respondents were male and 16% were females (table 1). The information needs of these farmers are categorized into cassava stem, price, loan, fertilizer, market, storage, labour cost and land (Table 2). Majority of the farmers agreed that they have high information need for procurement of high yielding cassava stem. 16% also agreed on the prices they will sale their products so that they can break even, and the loan facility they need to access respectively. The least number of farmers expressed interest in information on land acquisition.

They were asked whether they were aware of the use of information centers and libraries in the locality to find out the places where these farmers go to seek information. The results on table 3 show that majority of these farmers are not aware of such centers. This implies that they never used the centers. Though the information centre at Ahoada, the Local Government Headquarters is about few kilometers away from Upata clan, these farmers are semi-literate and were neither aware of such centre and those who know of the centre could not effectively use it. Another 30% said they use the centre occasionally when proper information is disseminated to them on time. The 18% illiterate farmers claim not to use the centre is attributed to their strong perception of culture, tradition and science.

Talking about information seeking behaviour of these cassava farmers, 20% of the respondents claim that they mostly collect information through their colleagues and friends (table 4). The information available to these trusted colleagues is another source of concern. Further investigation showed that there in an element of invisible college existing among these farmers. Such other means like Extension Workers, Association Members, Newspapers and Magazines fall between 15.96%, 13.11% and 11.08% respectively. Discussion over the radio broadcast is equally strong

in information provision. They cherish relevant broadcasts especially when they are delivered in their local languages. The library, seminar, workshop and TV are not commonly used sources of information for these cassava farmers (table 4). Unfortunately, they have not been exposed to seminar and workshops.

Table 5 shows that the most common problem they experienced was lack of knowledge of the existence of relevant information sources. Though other areas constitute problem but the ability to read and write seems not to have been recognized by these farmers as a serious problem. The younger generation below the age of 30 years account for the lowest percentage. The higher percentage of the farmers between the age of 30 and 40 years is understandable because this age range has more active cassava farmers as they are still young, married and settled. They also have more opportunities to land ownership since farmlands are freely given to only marry people by the community according to their custom.

From the result of information need, it is evident that these farmers are still involved in primitive and subsistent farming. They do not use much of scientific information in their farming practice. This calls for education and provision of opportunities to initiate learning process. It is clear that education at this level has not been given the desired attention by the government. The system of adult education is vital to these farmers. It is observed that there is nowhere in this locality that provision has been made for adult education. It is noticeable that people in the urban communities have access to this facility while those in rural areas do not have such opportunities. These results also show that even the available information centers are underutilized by these farmers. These call for informal education for the people. The teachers could be deployed the same way extension officers are deployed.

The present method whereby the extension officers interact with the farmers only to introduce planting material has not led to absolute awareness of the intricacies that will lead to boost in cassava production. If the available cassava stems which the people depended mostly get infected, these farmers will become helpless and may not react promptly to control the effect. This is because they only depend on the extension officers who may not immediately provide solution. If these farmers have been exposed to a system whereby they could easily source for information using the net, solution would be handy. A search using the information technology will make available immediate ideas that can provide results. Absence of libraries in these areas is also noted. Libraries would have provided reading material which would have enabled these farmers to develop appetite for reading. The available information center only provides technical information which may not easily be assimilated by these farmers. They have so much depended on their colleagues because they discuss their common problems and proffer solutions based on ideas generated locally or gotten from other friends. Absence of ability to recognize what constitute relevant information source still remains a problem. The information is not easily available and when available are utilized in piece meal.

**Table 1: Demographic information of respondents**

Age	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
20-30 years	177	18%	157	16%
30-40 years	236	24%	157	16%
40-above years	157	16%	98	10%

*Source:* Survey, 2011

**Table 2: Areas of Information need for cassava farmers**

Areas of Information Need	Frequency	Percentage
Cassava Stem	168	17.07
Prices	160	16.26
Loan	156	15.85
Fertilizer	152	15.45
Market	140	14.23
Storage	120	12.10
Labor Cost	48	4.88
Land	40	4.07
Total	984	100

*Source:* Survey, 2011

**Table 3: Use of Resources at Information Centre, Ahoada**

	Frequency	Percentage
No Information	512	52
Occasionally	295	30
Aware but not used	177	18
Total	984	100

*Source:* Survey, 2011

**Table 4: Information seeking behaviour**

	Frequency	Percentage
Colleagues/Friends	201	20.45
Extension Workers	157	15.96
Association Members	129	13.11
Newspaper/Magazine	109	11.08
Radio	93	9.45
Information Centre	73	7.42
TV	67	6.81
Library	65	6.40
Seminar	49	4.98
Workshop	40	4.07

*Source:* Survey, 2011

**Table 5: Problems in Obtaining Information**

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of knowledge of relevant Information	227	23.10
Time to consult information	115	11.69
Nearby information centre	182	18.50
Accessibility to information materials	154	15.65
Improper information materials	146	14.84
Ability to read and write	160	16.26

*Source:* Survey, 2011

## CONCLUSION

The cassava farmers in Upata clan of Ekpeye need information on various issues such as improved cassava stem, current local and foreign prices, source of fertilizer, marketing of their product, availability of loan, cost of labour input and how to procure land. This study reveals that the need for improved cassava stem and the prices for their product are paramount. The study also discovers that the cassava farmers' level of education as well as the use of institutional means in their locality is low. This, therefore, has resulted in seeking information mostly from colleagues and association members. The Upata - Ekpeye cassava farmers do not utilize all the information sources available to them. There are so many information sources available as discovered by this study. They have the opportunity of using an information center at the local government headquarters, but only a handful occasionally visits this centre.

The other means available to them include agricultural extension workers mostly from ADP (Agricultural Development Programme) who visit these farmers regularly to access the problems they encounter and offer expert advice. These extension workers often organize workshops and seminars on cassava farming processes that result in higher yield. Ekpeye farmers present process of seeking information has not provided room for envisaged improvement in future. They are still largely engaged in subsistent agriculture. It is hoped that if these cassava farmers are given more information, they will surely do better. More education of these farmers could be beneficial to them. It is notable that the younger generation has not featured prominently in this survey. This locality is noted for cassava production. The absence of farm settlement specifically dedicated to cassava production in this area has adversely affected the level of boost the trade would have received.

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