

Farmers' Access to Agricultural Information in Nigeria

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This article reports the results of a study that was awarded sixth place in the ASIST SIG/III 2002 International Paper Competition. The original presentation has been condensed, and details of the statistical analysis have been omitted for Bulletin presentation.

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Information is required to conduct research, and completed research generates further information, whose communication is vital. The communication of agricultural, scientific and technical information is one of the most important aspects of agricultural research. In Nigeria, one of the major agencies for this activity is the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services (NAERLS). It is critical that those for whom the information is targeted have access to it. The primary target of NAERLS information is Nigerian farmers, whose relative access is assessed in this study.

The NAERLS Survey

For this study, the research method adopted was the descriptive/survey type, and the population comprised the NAERLS staff and Nigerian farmers. A sample of 500 farmers, using a cluster sampling procedure was taken, made up of 100 farmers from each of the five ecological zones of Nigeria.

Three instruments were used for survey research: questionnaire, documentary sources and interview. There were two types of questionnaires, one for the NAERLS staff and the other for farmers. The NAERLS questionnaire was open-ended and sought to inquire into the institute's information services. The farmers' questionnaire was meant to seek for information on their access to NAERLS information/information services.

In administering the questionnaire to the farm-

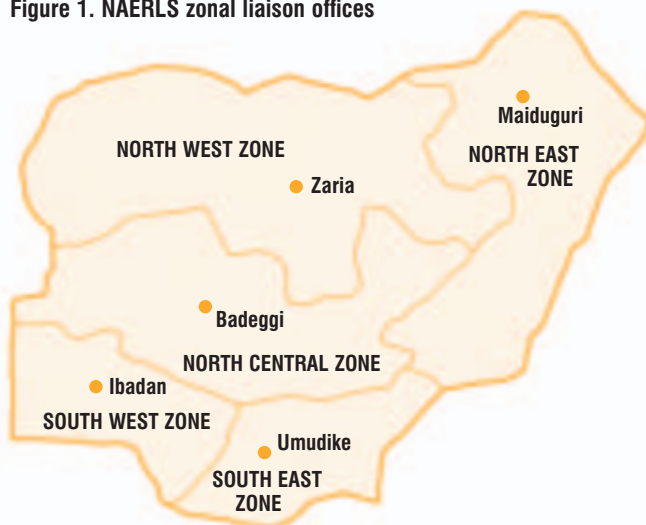
ers, the researcher made use of enumerators who were educated and could speak the local languages of the respondents in the respective zones. These enumerators used interviews to get responses to the questions. They then ticked the appropriate responses in the questionnaires of both literate and illiterate farmers. The purpose was to see which services were used and whether there were differences in access among the five ecological zones of Nigeria.

The NAERLS and Its Information Services

Information gathered from NAERLS shows that it coordinates agricultural extension and research in Nigeria, liaising as the name implies with all agro-based research institutes, all universities and other tertiary institutions offering agriculture, all international research institutes and all private and public agricultural units/departments in the country, etc. Among its activities as contained in *The NAERLS: Bank of Agricultural Information (1993)* are the production and beaming of audio and visual media packages, publication of extension literatures and the organization of training workshops and seminars.

To discharge its activities effectively, the NAERLS has liaison offices in each of the five ecological zones of Nigeria. Figure 1 shows the map of Nigeria indicating the location of each of the zones and their headquarters.

Figure 1. NAERLS zonal liaison offices



The zones and the states that make up each are:

1. North Central zone covers Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau States, and Federal Capital Territory with headquarters at Badeggi, near Bida.
2. North East zone takes care of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States. Its headquarters is at Maiduguri.
3. North West zone has Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara as the states it covers, with headquarters at Zaria, which also serves as the national headquarters.
4. South East zone with headquarters at Umudike covers Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers States.
5. South West Zone has its headquarters at Ibadan and it covers Delta, Edo, Ekiti Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States.

NAERLS Information Services

The NAERLS has a number of information services that can be categorized as follows:

- **Farm Broadcasts.** For farm broadcasts, the institute uses radio and television. There are 14 NAERLS programs broadcast in different radio stations across the country. The earliest of them commenced in 1963. From the 14 radio programs, a total of 6,938 releases have been made. They are broadcast in English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin English.

There are also currently two NAERLS television programs and one that has been discontinued. The television programs have had 3,163 releases as of the end of 2000. They are broadcast in Hausa and English in various television stations across the country.

- **Extension Publications.** In all, about 30 million copies of extension publications from over 1,000 titles have been produced and distributed to farmers and extension workers. These publications have included:

- Extension Guides
- Extension Bulletins
- Recommended Practices
- Circular Letters
- Flipbooks
- Posters
- Handbills
- Leaflets
- Daily Records of Extension Activities
- Newsletters
- Occasional papers
- Extension Journals
- Training Manuals
- Conference & Seminar Proceedings
- Hausa Publications
- Ajami Publications
- Cropping Season Evaluation Report
- Commodity Prices

- **NAERLS Newspaper Articles.** The institute produces newspaper articles meant as timely advisory service on improved agricultural practices to literate farmers. Table 1 gives the subject areas covered by the articles and the number of articles in each since the inception of the service up to 1997 when it ceased.

- **Agricultural Shows and Farmers' Field Days.** For the benefit of farmers and other agricultural practitioners, the NAERLS assists the federal, state and local governments to plan and organize agricultural shows and also participates actively in trade and science fairs. The institute also organizes farmers' field days, in addition to helping state agricultural development programs (ADPs) and other research institutes to organize them. Between 1965 and 2000, the institute participated in 333 agricultural shows.

- **Training.** The training is mainly directed at extension agents who it is expected would pass the knowledge acquired to farmers. The beneficiaries are extension agents from state ADPs, Ministries of Agriculture, educational institutions, farmers, etc. Between 1970 and 2000, the institute conducted 388 training sessions from which 53,528 participants across the country benefited, as shown in Table 2. For the purpose of training, the institute also produces documentary teaching slides, which are also distributed to the ADPs, Ministries of Agriculture and other parties. In all 470 slides each in a set of between 20 and 60 covering various areas of agriculture were produced and distributed.

- **Extension Advisory Services.** The NAERLS offers advisory services to livestock and crop farmers and rural women, as well as youths. They cover production, pest control, post-harvest technology and any other aspect or problem in agriculture for which beneficiaries invite the institute.

Table 1. NAERLS Newspaper Articles, 1976-1997

SUBJECT AREA	1976-1980	1981-1985	1986-1990	1991-1995	1996-1997
Livestock	5	41	15	13	4
Crop Protection	6	51	13	9	6
Gardening	3	17	14	7	2
Agricultural shows	4	15	5	2	1
Fertilizers & Manures	5	37	15	12	6
Home Economics	2	21	10	8	3
Farm Management	2	20	10	8	3
Poultry keeping	5	28	10	5	4
Extension problems	6	33	11	6	2
Crop production	-	8	27	19	14

Regional Differences

The analysis of the survey data showed that among the North East, North Central and North West Zones, there is no significant difference in farmers' access to disseminated information and information services. The three zones are however significantly different from the South West Zone in terms of access to disseminated information and information services. And between the South West and South East Zones, there is a significant difference in terms of the access farmers have to NAERLS information and information services. The most significant difference, however, is between the South East and the three northern Zones.

A number of factors are responsible for the difference in access to disseminated information in the zones. The farmers in the northern zones enjoy more information services than those in the southern zones; they have the advantage of closeness to the NAERLS headquarters; and they have been receiving the information and information services for a much longer time. Information provision to farmers by the institute began in the north in 1963 but in the south it was only in 1987 when the institute received a national mandate. Another important reason is the willingness of media organizations in the north to continue airing NAERLS informa-

tion services in the northern zones even when payments are not made. This is unlike in the southern zones, especially in the South East where the media houses promptly stop broadcasting the programs following default in payment. In the South East where access to NAERLS information services is least, most of the farmers indicate that they fail to use the agricultural radio programs because they are broadcast on short wave and medium wave bands instead of the frequency modulated (FM) band, which they prefer and mostly listen to.

Concluding Remark

The NAERLS has made a lot of effort to make agricultural information available to Nigerian farmers. Unfortunately, however, not all farmers in the country have equal access to these information services, with those in the southern part at disadvantage. It is hoped that the NAERLS will take measures to ensure that farmers in southern Nigeria have as much access to its information services as those in the north.

Table 2. Training conducted by NAERLS for extension agents, 1970-2000

	NUMBER CONDUCTED	CUMULATIVE	NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	CUMULATIVE
1970 – 1975	45	45	1,433	1,433
1976 – 1980	63	108	2,943	4,376
1980 – 1985	102	210	7,449	11,825
1986 – 1990	116	326	28,839	40,664
1991 – 1995	49	375	12,610	53,274
1996 – 2000	13	388	254	53,528