

Communicating Innovative Agricultural Practices to Youths in Ebonyi State, Nigeria for Sustainable Development

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Abstract: Agriculture is central to the survival of every nation in the world but the crude implements used in Agricultural practices in many rural areas leaves nothing to be desired of this all important sector of the economy. With such implements like hoes instead of tractors much energy is expended with little or nothing to show for it. That is why many youths prefer to waste precious years looking for white collar job instead of being proudly farmers. This paper examines how Innovative Agricultural Practices could be communicated to Youths in Ebonyi State in order to make Agriculture more attractive and less cumbersome. The study adopted survey research method and multiple stage sampling technique. The instruments of data collection were questionnaire and structured interview. Diffusion theory was adopted for the study. One of the findings of the study shows that the youth in Ebonyi State will willingly embrace Agriculture if fund is made available and Agricultural Innovation Practices are communicated to them in good time. We therefore recommend that Innovative Agriculture should be made less cumbersome but more attractive by carefully packaging messages about Innovative Agricultural Practices and presenting such messages to the Youth in the language they would understand.

Key words: Agricultural Innovation • Sustainable Development • Communication • Youth

INTRODUCTION

In the face of the current economic meltdown in the nation increased food production seems to be the only way to ensure food security for the teeming population of Nigeria. To realize this goal of ensuring food security in the country the interest of the youths who are the strength of the nation has to be captured and turned towards agriculture. The youths are no doubt energetic, daring and curious. They easily get attracted to new ideas due to their curiosity and they always want to try them out, hence, the need to communicate new innovative agricultural practices that could make Agriculture interesting and less cumbersome. National Youth Policy of Nigeria [1] says that the youths are one of the greatest assets that any nation could have. They are legitimately seen as the future leaders and the greatest investment for a country's development. Unfortunately, Nonyelu in Onemolease and Alakpa [2] laments that the Nigerian agricultural sector is filled with an ageing farm population that is fast depleting instead of the youth who are energetic and at their productive year. Confirming Nonyelu's assertion, Nwonuah [3] affirms that the youths

who are supposed to replace the aging farmers are either withdrawing from the farm or reluctant to go into farming as a profession largely because of the low productivity and economic returns associated with the profession due largely to the crude implements used and old method of farming especially in the rural areas like Ebonyi State.

Madukwe and Ayichi [4] agree that "there should be deliberate effort to attract and train the youth in agriculture." In the past agriculture was the main stay of the Nigerian Economy but ever since the discovery of oil, attention shifted from agriculture to oil but now we are gradually returning to agriculture. That is why communicating innovative agricultural practices to youths is one of the ways of motivating them to become active participants in the agricultural sector and will no doubt hasten the development of this sector of the nation's economy. Matanmi [5] confirms that, the federal government of Nigeria recognises the need to develop agricultural innovations that are appropriate to Nigerian environment that is why it sets up agricultural related research institute to develop innovations appropriate to crops and animal husbandry in different ecological zones in Nigeria.

Youths are the strength of every nation. The Nigeria National Youth Policy [6] defined youth as persons from the age of 18 to 35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. That the age range 15-24 often used by the United Nations and others for statistical purposes is too narrow for countries like Nigeria [1]. That is why we defined youth in this work as people between the ages of 18 and 35. Communication as a concept simply means the basic ideas and facts about the transmission of messages from one person or group of people to another.

It is not just essential but indispensable to the development process of every nation. According to Mc Quail [7] the media is a potential force for public enlightenment. This means that the media is an essential component for teaching agricultural innovations to the Nigerian youths. Ndolo [8] avers that a person's ability to communicate increases productivity for his or her organization. Invariably, if agricultural innovations are communicated to Nigerian Youths, it will increase their knowledge of new methods of farming which will in turn increase agricultural productivity.

Statement of the Problem: With the present economic recession in the country, the emphasis is now on how to increase food production to feed the teeming population. However, this could only be possible when innovative agricultural practices are communicated to the group that is strong enough to do the work. It is on this backdrop that we decided to find out if the innovative agricultural practices are actually communicated to the youths who are energetic enough to make the vision of increasing food production a reality.

Objectives: The general objective of this study is to discover how innovative agricultural practices could be communicated to Ebonyi youths to achieve sustainability in the agricultural sector.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Discover how agriculture could be made more attractive to youths in Ebonyi State.
- Find out whether the innovative agricultural practices are communicated to the youths at the grass root.
- Discover whether the innovative agricultural practices so far communicated to the youth are yielding positive result.

Research Questions:

- How can agriculture be made more attractive to youths in Ebonyi youths?

- Are innovative agricultural practices communicated to the youths at the grass root?
- Have the innovative agricultural practices so far being communicated to the youth yielding positive result?

Literature Review

The Need to Increase Food Security in Nigeria: Bremner [9] citing Food and Agriculture Organization of the United States [10] says that nearly 240 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, or one person in every four, lack adequate food for a healthy and active life. He equally observes that food prices and drought are pushing more people into poverty and hunger. Concurring with Bremner, Obi in Ridwan, Suleiman and Fatonji, [11] says that critics contend that despite the Nigeria's massive wealth, especially the wealth generated from oil over the past 50 years, about one in three of Nigeria's 140 million people goes to bed very hungry every night.

Channels of Communicating Agricultural Innovative Practice to the Youths: The following are ways of Communicating Agricultural innovative Practice to the Youths.

Online Communication: Rothaermel and Sugiyama [12] note that the internet enables millions of people worldwide to exchange information and conduct business. That is why they see a *virtual community* as the community of mind formed through an electronic communication medium and the community is not bound by space and time. Toñnies in Rothaermel and Sugiyama [12] distinguished three different kinds of communities: (1) community by kinship, (2) community by locality and (3) community of mind. Communities by kingship are those connected by blood, marriage, or nature; communities by locality are those bound together by virtue of their living together in the same locality while communities of the mind are those formed through the electronics communication medium and such communities are not bound by space or time. This is what could be called internet community.

According to Shapiro & Varian in Rothaermel and Sugiyama [12] "a virtual internet community is a potentially powerful and innovative organizational form, which can be created through the aggregation of people who share a common interest." This is the fastest and cheapest means of spreading information to people who are scattered in different locations in the world. So information about new agricultural innovations spread through this means can reach thousands of youths both in the cities and the rural areas.

Opinion Leaders as Channel of Communication:

Although the communication of opinion leaders is informal, they represent a reliable source of information; and being closer to the people makes it easier for them to play a major role in influencing their decision-making. That is why Lyons and Henderson [13] say that marketers attempt to create communication channels to reach opinion leaders in order to encourage them to spread positive word-of-mouth to the people. When opinion leaders are used to spread new and improved method of farming, adoption becomes faster because people gladly receive information they bring give with little or no resistance.

Peer to Peer Communication: Peer groups have powerful influence on their members. So, communicating agricultural innovative practices through this means makes the innovation easily accepted by the people.

Mass Media: People tend to believe messages they receive from the media. Hence the mass media with its potentials of reaching a wide heterogeneous audience at the same time is a good channel of communicating agricultural innovation practices to the youths in Ebonyi State. Their coverage can reach the remotest part of the village especially when you think about the radio which is a unique medium of communication.

Theoretical Foundation: This research is anchored on innovation diffusion theory. According to Wogu [14], this theory was popularised by Everett Rogers in 1962, who combined the information flow research findings with the flow of information and personalized influence in fields like anthropology, Sociology and rural agricultural extension work. That means that this theory is an expansion of Lazarsfeld's two-step flow. "Roger explains that diffusion is the process of how the news and uptake of innovation is communicated through social contacts and networks with respect to time" [15]. This theory is based on the understanding that when new technological innovations are introduced they will move across a series of stages before being adopted. If we follow the steps, it means that the message would first get to the mass media that would create awareness and this will then open door for the majority of the people to hear about it. The next stage is when early adopters hear the media message about the innovative agricultural practices and adopts it.

After this stage the opinion leaders follows the early adopter in adopting the innovation. When they find the innovation useful the opinion leaders persuades their followers to adopt it. Then it spreads as many people discovers and adopts the innovation. A group of lagers are usually the last to adopt the innovation

We adopted this theory because it provides a better strategy for overcoming barrier to innovations. With this, government can recruit people to go to the grass root and directly influence adopters and opinion leaders to influence the youths in their area to adopt the innovative agricultural practices that will be helpful to them. When the theory is applied, there would be no fear that farmers would harm themselves or the land like what happened when fertilizer was newly introduced. Those who did not know how to apply it destroyed their farmland, polluting streams and causing erosion simply because the method of application was not properly communicated to them.

Methodology: Survey research method was adopted for this study because it is the best method for studying vast population as it can be used to investigate problems in realistic settings. Since the population of a place according to the Second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria [16] is the one third of the entire population, the population of this study is 834666 which is one third of the total population of Ebonyi State. When we saw that this population is too big for us to study within the space of time we have for the study, we decided to use multi-stage sampling technique to get the desired sample size. Through this method we first took the three Senatorial Zones of Ebonyi State as the starting point (the first cluster). The second stage was the selection of two local government areas from the each of the Senatorial Zones making it a total of six local government areas that were studied. On the third stage, we narrowed it down to three communities from each local government area which gave us eighteen (18) communities on the whole. The final stage was the distribution of ten (10) copies of the questionnaire to each of the communities which gave us a total of 180 copies of questionnaire. Four Liket type scale of 14 items were administered to the 180 respondents. The 180 copies of questionnaire were randomly distributed through face to face contacts because we had to explain areas the respondents did not understand directly to them. That was why we recorded hundred percent response. The formula we used was

$$X = \frac{\sum Fx}{N}$$

Where X = sample mean

X = value allotted to the variables

F = Frequency

N = Total number of respondents

Value allotted to the variables

Strongly Agree = 4

Agree = 3

Disagree = 2

Strongly Disagree = 1

$$\text{Level of significance} = 2.5 \frac{(4+3+2+1)}{4}$$

That is to say that any score from 2.5 and above is accepted while scores below 2.5 are rejected.

Discussion of Findings: A look at the table below reveals that the majority (61.1%) of the respondents were male. The table also reveals that the both the married and the unmarried under the specified age were involved in the study and so were people of different age bracket.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	101	56.1
Female	79	43.9
Total	180	100
Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-23	80	44.4
24-29	72	40.0
30-35	28	15.6
Total	180	100
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	110	61.1
Married	12	6.7
Divorced	16	8.9
Widowed	42	23.3
Total	180	100
Educational Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	61	33.9
Secondary	67	37.2
OND/ND/NCE	20	11.1
HND/BSC./BA/MED/BED	31	17.2
MSc/MA/MED/PhD	1	0.6
Total	180	100

Research Question 1: How can agriculture be made more attractive to in Ebonyi youths?

Table 2:

Agriculture could be made more attractive to youths in Ebonyi State by communicating innovative agricultural practices to them.	180	0	0	0	4
Youths respond positively to innovative agricultural practices communicated to them through their local language	180	0	0	0	4

The items in table two scored 4points, showing that agriculture could actually be made more attractive to the youths especially when the innovative agriculture practices are communicated to them in their local dialect.

Research Question 2: Are the innovative agricultural practices communicated to the youths at the grass root?

Table 3: Respondents view on how the innovative agricultural practices are communicated to Ebonyi youths.

Innovative Agricultural Practices are communicated to the youths through					
(i)Agro Trade Fair	14	10	44	112	1.6
ii)Launching of Farming Season	16	25	40	99	1.8
iii)Extension Services	101	10	18	1	3.7
iv)Opinion leaders	116	12	2	0	3.9
v)Mass Media	48	110	10	12	3
vi)All of the above	180	0	0	0	4
Innovative Agricultural practices are communicated to the grass root by the government.	1	5	3	171	1.1

Table three indicates that although innovative agricultural practices are communicated to the youths through all the mean mentioned in table three, it is communicated better through opinion leadership which has 3.9 points, extension services and the mass media which have 3.7 and 3 points respectively as against Agro Trade Fair and launching of farming season which have 1.6 ad 1.8 points respectively. As for whether the people at the grass root are carried along the table shows the innovative agricultural practices are not communicated to them.

Research Question Three: Have the innovative agricultural practices so far communicated to the youth been yielding positive result?

Table 4: Respondents view on whether innovative agricultural practices have been yielding positive result.

The innovative agricultural practices communicated to the youths in the Ebonyi State have been yielding positive result.	2	7	159	12	2
The youths prefer innovative agricultural practices like					
(i) Improved seedling	180	0	0	0	4
(ii) Weed control	170	6	3	1	3.9
(iii) Fertilizer application	180				4
(iv) Pest management	180				4

On the issue of whether the innovative agricultural practices communicated to the youths are yielding positive result, the answer is yes since those who have been privileged to be taught new and improve way of farming have been using it to improve their food production as suggested by table 4 above

CONCLUSION

Agriculture is being practised in a way it is cumbersome and unattractive to the young and that should engage it. That is why youths in our rural communities migrate to town living the old men and men women in the rural areas to do farm work and that is why we seem not to have enough to feed the ever growing population of this our great country. Haven discovered this; the Ebonyi State government have been communicating different innovative agricultural practices to the youth including sending them outside the country to study Agriculture. All this are ways the government tries to make agriculture attractive to the young people of Ebonyi State.

Recommendations:

- To develop strong and healthy generation, agriculture should be made attractive to the youths by communicating innovative agricultural practices to them using their local dialect especially those at the grass root grass root.
- Innovative agricultural practices should be communicated to the youths at the grass root and fund should also be made available to those interested in going into full time agriculture.
- For the innovative agricultural practices communicated to the youth to yield desired result, government should make improved seedling and new implement available at a subsidized rate for the youths who are interested in Agriculture.

- Above all, youths who venture into Agriculture should be celebrated by giving them special award just as we celebrate those in sports.

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