

## Socio-Economic Factors Affecting Use of Information Sources among Cashew Farmers in Niger State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** In order to ensure the adoption of appropriate technology for Cashew cultivation, farmers received information and education from different sources. However, what is not clear is the extent to which farmers utilize the various information sources. The purpose of the study was, therefore, to assess farmer's use of information sources and the importance or otherwise of farmers socio-economic factors in the effective utilization of the information sources. Interview schedules were used to collect data from 45 farmers randomly selected in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State. Data were collected on farmer's socio-economic characteristics and extent of the utilization of the various information sources. The data was analyzed using frequency distribution, percentages means and chi square. The result revealed that village extension agents and farm services are most often used than radio and village leaders. Sex is significant at  $p < 0.10$  while marital status is significant, at  $P < 0.05$ , in explaining farmer's use of information sources. Age, educational status, sources of land acquisition, primary and secondary occupation, distant to home and farming experience are not significant. It is recommended that more village extension agent should be recruited, trained and given appropriate package of good agricultural practices for dissemination to farmers in cashew production. Gender issue need to be looked into critically in targeting cashew farmers on use of agricultural information.

**Key words:** Information sources • Socio-economic factors • Cashew • Farmers and cultivation

### INTRODUCTION

Cashew was introduced to Nigeria by Portuguese traders or explorers during 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries [1]. During the past decade, the annual production of cashew nut in Nigeria has increased by almost six folds from 30,000 metric tons in 1990 to a current level of 176,000 metric tons and in 16 out of the 36 States of Nigeria, Only 12,000 metric tons of this amount are being processed into various products, such as cashew wine, which are consumed locally in the country. However, prior to this, production was relatively static at 25,000 metric tons over a 25 year period from 1965-1990 [2, 3].

There has been effort by the past and present government of Nigeria towards supporting increased cultivation of cashew. However, over the years, it has

been observed and reported that cashew crop is not accorded the deserved importance in Nigeria [4]. It is therefore important to know the extent to which people understand the potentials of the cashew so as to help improve the cultivation of cashew in the study area. Agricultural extension can be said to be germane in enhancing the productivity of farmers and enhancing agricultural development in the country. It has been noted that any development in the agricultural sector is lingered on the effectiveness of the extension system that is in place [5].

The importance of agricultural information in the development of agriculture through agricultural extension cannot be overemphasized. This is because extension practitioners depend largely on information to communicate effectively with target audience.

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It has been reported that extension outreach strategies are the techniques mostly used to reach the clientele and are usually made up of individual, group and mass media methods [6]. Extension agents are to bring about change by a way of providing the useful information that will enable a farmer understand and make good decision about a particular innovation. Though it is also believed that the biggest problem faced by making information available to farmers by extension agents are that large part of the budget is paid out as salaries, which often leaves very little for the purchase of the information gadgets[7,8]. It has been found among others that ‘radio listening groups’ is an effective communication outreach strategy [9]. In Niger State, the Agricultural Development Projects has been disseminating agricultural information to the farmers using village leaders, village extension agents, radios and farm service centers. However, what is not clear is the extent the farmers have benefited from the various approaches. The following questions therefore arise: To what extent do cashew farmers utilize the various information sources? How do the farmer’s socio-economic characteristics affect their use of the information sources? It is expected that the recommendations from this study may assist the Government, NGO, scientists and extension agents to plan strategies of improving the information sources and its utilization for cashew cultivation in the study area. These issues are investigated in this study.

**Methodology:** The study was carried out in Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria. The study area is within latitude 3.20° East and longitude 11.30° North with a population of 100,316 made up of 55,216 male and 54,140 female. [10]. The dominant ethnic groups are Gwaris, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. There are two distinct climate season, rainy (April to October) and dry (November to March). Common arable crops grown include, yam, millet, rice, maize, melon, cowpea while Cashew is the dominant cash crop, livestock are reared in small scale.

Simple random sampling technique was used in the collection of the primary data. Forty five farmers involved in cashew production were randomly selected from six

selected villages in the LGA. At least six farmers were selected in each villages selected. Data were collected from the farmers with the aid of a structured questionnaire. Information was collected on the socio-economic characteristics of the farmers and information sources. The socio-economic characteristics were analyzed using frequency distribution, percentages and means. Chi-square technique was used to test goodness of fit of socio-economic characteristics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Economic Characteristics of Respondents:

Table 1 show that the cashew farmers’ ages range between 20 and 70 years with a mean age of 41years. This indicates that both youth and the elderly are involved in cashew production but averagely they are young adult. This has implication for the sourcing and use of information. The young are expected to be ready to receive and use information better than the elderly that are expected to resist new information [11, 12].

Furthermore, the respondent farming experiences ranges between 5 and 57 years with a mean of 20 years, indicating that there are farmers with few and long years of experience. Averagely, the cashew farmers have long years of experience. The experience may be related to age of the farmer. It is expected that farmers with long years of experience have better managerial ability and tend to be more practical, especially with regards to utilization of information [13, 14].

Farm income of the respondent is low with an average of N22, 955.55 per annum per hectare and farm size also ranges from a minimum of 1 hectare to a maximum of 9 hectares with an average of 3.84 hectares. This shows that the respondents are low income and small scale farmers. This may affect their attitude to sourcing and utilization of information.

**Respondent’s Personal Characteristics:** Table 2 show that the distribution of the respondent’s personal characteristics, 93.3 % were male and 88.89 % are married, the analysis further revealed that 33.3% have never been

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Socio-economic characteristics	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Error
Age (Yrs.)	20	70	41.00	3.8
Farming Experience (Yrs.)	5	57	19.93	2.4
Estimated Annual Income (N)	4000	100,000	22,955.55	3316.0
Farm size (HA)	1	9	3.84	1.6

Source: Field survey 2006

Table 2: Distribution of respondents' personal characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	42	93.3
Female	3	6.67
Marital Status		
Married	40	88.89
Single	5	11.11
Educational Status		
Never been to School	15	33.33
Primary education	9	20.00
Quranic (Primary) education	4	8.89
Secondary education	5	11.11
Tertiary education	12	26.67
Primary Occupation		
Farming	28	62.22
Civil servant	14	31.11
Students	3	6.67
Secondary Occupation		
None	38	84.45
Trading	4	8.89
Artisanship	3	6.67
Farm land acquisition		
Inherited	32	71.11
Rented	4	6.67
Purchased	7	15.56
Gift	2	4.44

Source: Field survey 2006

Table 3: Respondent Ranking of Information Sources

Information Sources *	%	Rank
Village leaders	71.11	4
Village Extension Agents	80.00	2
Radio	91.11	1
Farm Service Centers	77.78	3

Source: Field Survey 2006

Note \* Many of the respondent indicated more than one source.

to school while 26.67% have tertiary education, 20 percent have primary education and only 11.11 % have secondary education showing that majority are educated and married male cashew farmers which is expected to influence positively utilization of information. About 71.1% have at least primary education which is an attribute that is positively related to information communication. Most of farmers, 62.22 percent, practiced farming as their primary occupation while 31.11% and 6.67% are civil servants and students respectively. About 84.45% have no secondary occupation. Even though majorities are in farming, most of the farmland, 71.11% are inherited.

**Respondent Information Sources:** Table 3 show that 71.11 percent sourced their information from their village leaders while Village extension agents and radio accounts for 80 percent and 91.11 percent respectively. Farm service centers accounts for 77.78 percent. This reveals that wide range of information sources is available to the cashew farmers but the widely used are radio, village extension agents, farm service centers and village leaders. However, with respect to ranking for their effectiveness, radio is ranked best followed by village extension agent. Their village leaders are ranked lowest probably due to the technical nature of the information and availability of their leaders to give practical training and do a follow up on their trials. The widespread use of radio as a source of information also corresponds with other findings of Nwachukwu and Obuh [15].

**Frequency of Use of Information Sources for Cashew Cultivation:** Table 4 show the level of usage of information sources. It revealed that 42.22 percent and 40 percent of the farmers very often use farm services and village extension agents. The village leaders accounts for 26.67 percent and radio with only 17.78 percent of those who very often use them. Despite the widespread use of radio as information source it is not most often used. 37.7 percent of the respondent occasionally uses radio. Only 13.3 percent of the respondent does not use village extension agents while 20 percent of the respondent could not make a decision on their level of use of village leaders.

Previous studies indicated that interpersonal communication is the most frequent medium of dissemination of agricultural information [16]. It is therefore not surprising that village extension agents are often (28.89%) and very often (40%) used, accounting for 68.9 percent of farmers that often utilize the source. Farm services are also important accounting for 60 percent of the most frequently used source of information. They provided the needed input to enhance increased productivity and better income. One of the major constraints in cashew production is the unavailability of appropriate input at the right time. Credit facilities for expansion of cashew farming could also be provided through these farm services centers where the men have been organized into cooperatives. Village extension agents and farm services are best approaches for interpersonal communication on new technology for increased productivity. Most of the works on cashew farms, clearing, planting and weeding and pesticide applications are carried out by the men. The women are mostly involved in harvesting and processing.

Table 4: Level of use of information sources by farmers

Frequency of Usage	Village Leaders %	Village Extension Agents %	Radio %	Farm Services %
No Response	9 (20.00)	3 (6.67)	5 (11.11)	8 (13.33)
None	5 (11.11)	6 (13.33)	5 (11.11)	4 (8.89)
Occasionally	8 (17.78)	5 (11.11)	17 (37.78)	8 (17.78)
Often	11 (24.44)	13 (28.89)	10 (22.22)	8 (17.78)
Very Often	12 (26.67)	18 (40.00)	8 (17.78)	19 (42.22)
Total	45 (100.00)	45 (100.00)	45 (100.00)	45 (100.00)

Source: Field Survey 2006

Table 5: Chi Square on Socio economic factors and information source

Variables	Value (x <sup>2</sup> )	Prob.
Age	3.4875	0.32
Sex	2.5714	0.10
Educational Status	2.1825	0.70
Farming Experience	4.2738	0.51
Primary Occupation	2.7643	0.25
Secondary Occupation	2.7104	0.43
Land acquisition	6.1393	0.18
Farm distance to house	2.2875	0.31
Reason for growing Cashew	5.1995	0.51
Marital Status	4.5000	0.03

Source: Field Survey 2006

Table 5 shows the result of the chi-square analysis. It is found that farmer's socio-economic characteristics such as age, educational status, farming experience, primary and secondary occupation, land acquisition, farm distance to house and reasons for growing cashew are not significant in influencing cashew farmer's attitude towards information source. Sex is significant at  $p = 0.10$ , while marital status is significant at  $p < 0.05$  in explaining farmer's attitude towards information source. Therefore gender issue is important in targeting cashew farmers with respect to information source. This is further enhanced by the significance of marital status. In this study majority of the farmers are married male therefore training on new technology and farm business should be directed to the married men Their wives may have peculiar role in the decision of the farming business.

### CONCLUSION

Sex and marital status are the significant socio economic factors in cashew cultivation emphasizing the importance of gender issue in the communication of agricultural information. The married young men should therefore be the target for training in a Farmer Business School. This will reduce the rural urban drift by the young ones and encourage them to participate more in rural

farming development. The farm services should be provided with adequate inputs along with leaflets and extension bulletins on new technology. It is also recommended that more village extension agents should be recruited, trained and given appropriate package of good agricultural practices for dissemination to farmers in cashew production.

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