

# Analysis of Traditional Information Dissemination and Communication Method among Rural Farmers. Evidence from Traditional Communities in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Governments have been largely responsible for research and the provision of extension services in Nigeria. The emphasis has been on the transfer of technology, paying little attention to farmer development and communication needs. Recently, the high output of agricultural research has led to a large pool of new agricultural technologies, which are yet to be disseminated to farmers, particularly those in the core rural areas. Therefore this study examined development and information need of the resource poor and the strategy adopted to meet these needs, using 'town crier' as a case study. The study identified 2 states in south west, Nigeria, based on literature/past studies, where this concept has been adopted. A focused group discussion technique and interview schedule was adopted for data collection. The study identified 141 'town criers' across the study areas through the help of key informants. Results shown all Town Criers are male, average age of 55.54 years and all have post-secondary education. Town Crier primarily source of information is from the traditional-head. Main information disseminated by the Town Crier bothers on security of the town and community development and projects. The study concluded that this channel rarely meets the information need of the people, as the study revealed that only 20% of such information meets these needs. Past studies have documented that information/communication channels in Nigeria such as extension institution has collapse, there is no effective communication channels in the country again. The small number of extension officers that exists, only congregate at the urban towns, leaving behind those at the rural areas. Thus, the use of town criers in this regards can be used effectively to fill this gap and can also be trained on basic extension work.

**Keywords:** 'Town criers', information dissemination, key informant, participatory approach, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Information is an important tool used in the realization of any objective or goal set by individuals. It remains the lifeblood of any individual or organization. It is a valuable resource required in any society; thus acquiring and using information are critical and important activities. Users of information use it for different reasons. Some use it for health; others use it for advancement in knowledge, others for politics. To all these people information seeking is a fundamental human process closely related to learning and problem solving (Goldfrab, 2006). Many factors initiate the search for information; among these are: individual tasks for knowledge advancement, creativity and for future documentation. Information seeking process depends on these tasks, and the complexity of the task/difficulty is an important factor that influence individual in seeking information.

This reason of seeking for information depends on searcher's job, subject and educational attainment (Burkett, 1992). The importance of information in the developmental process is increasingly

recognized, not only by those involved in development work, but also by the recipients of such information (Abraham, 2009). "Information is now accepted as an important factor in the sustained development of any society because it reduces uncertainty, and enhances awareness of possible actions to take to solve problems" (Adimorah, 1995). Lack of information is argued to act as a barrier to development because of importance of information provision in "capacity building" and "empowering communities" (Wakelin & Simelane, 1995).

Information and its dissemination appropriately are seen as critical resource for people and communities in both rural and urban areas (Okogbe, 2002). However, the lack of information provision in rural contexts remains a problem. Thus, there is alarming information gap that exists between rural and urban areas and how little is being done to bridge this gap (Moyo, 1994). It is assumed that if we know the factors which influence information need and the demand for the information we are likely to be in a better position to design better information systems and services. Therefore it is important to ascertain and distinguish between the information needs of an individual or group as well as how such information needs are passed or channelled to meet these needs.

Several channels and methodology are being use to bring information to audience; such as the media, internets, institutions, social functions, Town-criers, but in the traditional African settings where most residence are illiterates the mode of passing information to such categories of people are through "Town-criers"(City of East Yorkshire, 2007). This medium of information dissemination is found to be effective, cheap, simple and reliable (Abraham, 2009). The uses of Town Criers are still in vogue in some traditional towns and villages in Africa and some part of the Caribbean (Meyer, 2005).

Past studies have shown that information/communication channels in Nigeria such as extension institution has collapse, there is no effective communication channels in the country again (Igboka, & Atinmo, 2002.). The small number of extension officers that exists, only congregate at the urban towns, leaving behind those at the rural areas. This has pushed many rural areas/community leaders to develop their own way/form of disseminating information through the use of the "Town-criers". For instance the king/Oba or Traditional-head or Oba/Chief in council uses someone that knows the terrain and quite familiar with the community. This person is thus, tagged the "Town-criers".

Recently, the high output of agricultural research has led to a large pool of new agricultural technologies, which are yet to be disseminated to farmers, particularly those in the core rural/traditional towns. In order to bridge this gap and accelerate the pace of dissemination of the research findings and other necessary information that could be of benefit to farmers, a variety of communication channels have been adopted in different cities, towns and communities. This is in the hope/assumption that both the approaches and technical information packages are suitable and accessible to farmers'.

Consequently, this purpose of this study is to examine the appropriateness, reliability and effectiveness of information disseminated to people using Town-criers. In addition, the study intends to; identify Town-criers primary source of information and evaluate type of information disseminated. Also, to pinpoint the information need of the people, assess the extent to which information disseminated meet their information needs.

## Methodology

### **Area of the Study**

This study was undertaken in Osun and Ondo States in South-western, Nigeria. The choice of these States is from literature/past studies that revealed the States to have the most traditional towns and

villages in Nigeria. This was attested to by the annual “Osun/Oshogbo” (Osun State) and “Marè” in Idanre (Ondo State) festivals respectively, that always attract tourists from the entire world. Centre of attractions visited by these tourists are located in these traditional towns. Osun and Ondo States are inland states in southwestern Nigeria their capitals are Osogbo and Akure respectively. These states are divided into three federal senatorial districts, each of which is composed of two administrative zones. The 2006 National population estimated the state’s population as 5,690,572 (about 3, 6% of the country population). These states lie between longitudes 4.00 E and 6.00E and latitudes 5.45 N and 8.15 N respectively.

### **Sampling technique**

Literature/past studies helped to identify the selected states. In addition, through secondary sources revealed that Osun and Ondo States, Nigeria have the largest number of traditional towns in Nigeria (FRN, 2007). These states are divided into 3 senatorial districts. Simple random technique was used to pick one local government in each senatorial district. Based on literature review/past studies 2 communities were therefore purposively picked from this local government. Before the final selection, pre-test survey was carried out to ascertain that the selected communities fulfilled customized criteria as follows;

1. Presence of Town crier
2. Lack of effective communication channels
3. Majority of the people are unable to read nor write
4. Majority of the communities are practicing farmers
5. Poor basic infrastructural facilities like; absence of comprehensive health centre, lack of potable water, incessant power outage, improper layout, and unstructured roads.
6. Most residential buildings are either built by mud or bricks.
7. Huts and hamlets still prominent within the communities.

All these selected communities chosen possess all these criteria.

A Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) technique and interview schedule was adopted for data collection. At each location, discussions were held with identified Town-criers group and have 6-8 persons in the group. The group was identified through the help of key informants at each location. In addition, FGDs were also held with the people/community. Participants in the FGDs were selected with the help of the key informant too. This is done to help solicit participants’ reaction and attitude towards the message brought by the Town-criers. Also at what level this information meets their needs. key informant was trained in the techniques behind the rationale of the survey prior to the discussions and sessions. A discussion guide was used in each of the group discussions. Discussion guide were developed and tailored to capture the objectives of the study.

### **Results and Discussions**

Town-criers are member of the traditional chiefs. There are three prominent types of chiefs in Yoruba land (south-west, Nigeria): Family Ties/ruling families, Traditional Chiefs and Honorary Chiefs. These categories of chiefs are member of the King/Chief in council and member of board of trustee of the community. Nomination into the chieftaincy title is done by the Traditional-head/king/Oba/community leaders. Criteria used for selection is contained in the Traditional-head/king/Oba’s brief and they are; the recipients integrity, contribution to community development, educational attainment, familiarity with the traditional norms and custom of the community. Town-criers are therefore picked from any of these traditional chiefs, while Head of the Traditional Chiefs nominates who to belong to the town crier group. The metric for selection into the Town-crier group include:

1. Commitment and devotion to community project/work
2. Run errands for the king or King in council for minimum of 5 years
3. Resident in the community and must familiarize with the community/environment.
4. Participation in his ability/activities in the progress of the community
5. Have a reasonably level of education

Therefore all Town-criers are Traditional Chiefs and not *vice-versa*.

The Town-criers group has metrics and measures adopted to assess their activities. This is done through their fortnightly meetings where they meet to review their weekly activities of recent works. The forum is also used to appraise type of information passed and how such information disseminated was reacted/widely accepted by the community and who does the next assignment. For emergency information the responsibility lies on the head to either delegate or carry out the task himself.

Findings shown that 141 Town-criers were successfully identified and interacted with, average age of 55.54 years old (51-65 years) and are all males. Town-criers have minimum of primary and maximum of post-secondary education, thus, the average educational status is post-primary school. Majority of the Town-criers are primarily engaged in active farming, with relatively few numbers engaged in non-farming activities such as artisans' local politics and paid employment. Findings revealed that Town-criers are practicing farmers and earns a sustainable livelihood.

Town Crier primary source of information are from: king/Oba (73.2%), some influential members of the community (14.3%) and Oba/chief in council (12.5%). This shows that King/Oba has the monopoly of passing information to the people. The implication is that effective and useful information may not be passed to the people. Town-crier attracts the community through the use of Gong (85.37%), Horn and Creating Bonfire (48.78%) and also the use of local gunshot (12.5%) to draw attention. The use of this medium signifies the presence of the Town-criers and the people/community may troop out to listen.

Information disseminated by the Town-crier include; issues bothering on the security of the town (65%), community development and projects (62%), health awareness (58%), community development levies/taxies (55%), visit of important dignitaries to the community (43%) and announcing the next market days and other important peculiar date (31%) (Table 1). People/community assessment of information disseminated by the Town-criers revealed that often community security issues were disseminated (76%), community development and projects (65%) and health issues (61%). However, people feels that information brought to them by Town-criers is not useful as it does not bother on their livelihood security and improvement.

**Table 1: Information Disseminated by Town Crier to the Community**

Type of Information Disseminated	Percentage
Security of the town	<b>65.0</b>
Community development and projects	<b>62.0</b>
Health awareness	<b>58.0</b>
Community development levies and taxies	<b>55.0</b>
Visit of important dignitaries to the community	<b>43.0</b>
Market days and other important peculiar date of the community culture	<b>31.0</b>

**Source:** Focus Group Discussions

Table 2 show people responses/feelings about the Town-crier message conveyed to them. When there is a call for community labour or information about tax payment and payment of public utilities like energy or water, people responses were always poor (Table 2). Information that bothers on free access to medical facilities, training and empowerment programmes and access to credit facilities among others (Table 2) always received favourable response.

**Table 2: Response of the community to the information disseminated by the Town Crier N= 302.**

Information on	Scale of Response Reaction	Frequency (Percentage)
Community Labour	Low	12
Visits of Very Important Guests	Medium	38
Tax payment	Low	14
Scholarships/Bursary for Indigent Student	High	78
Payment For the use of public utilities (Energy and Water)	Low	13
Distribution of special gift items	Medium	45
Special days	Medium	47
Special prayers for the community	Low	18
Free access to medicals facilities	High	89
Training and empowerment programme	High	85
Conflicts resolution among the elders	Low	11
Access to credit facilities/important farm inputs at government controlled price	High	84

Source: Field Survey 2007/08

Focus Group Discussions

In order to evaluate the information need of the communities *vis-vis* information convey to them by the Town-criers. Results of this finding are presented from Table 3. The results showed that most of the information disseminated did not meet the people expectations. Information on livelihood security and improvement were met by only 20% as against 90% required by the community (Table 3). Thus, most information disseminated by the Town-crier is not always useful to the people/communities.

**Table 3: Information disseminated vis-vis Information need of the community**

Information on	Community Info. Need (%)	Town Crier Info. Dissemination (%)	Remarks (%)
Development of the Town	72	25	47
Education and Infrastructural Development of the Town	68	15	53
Issues Bothering on the Security of the Town	64	21	43
Reliable source of Agricultural Inputs at reduced cost (e.g. Fertilizer, Improved seed)	82	14	68
Provision of Basic Amenities for the Town	61	10	51
Improving their present Livelihood	90	20	70

Source: Field Survey 2007/08

Focus Group Discussions

Furthermore, during the FGD and interview scheduled with the people, the results revealed that 89.2% of the participants were aware of the existence of “Town Crier” and 16.7% indicated that information disseminated by this channel of communication only meet 20% of their respective information needs. While 83.3% indicated that it rarely meet their information needs.

Sources where relevance and useful information were received include Radio, Television, Extension agent, State Agricultural Development Agencies, Farmer’s groups/association/cooperative. Information received in these channels includes improved farming practices, agricultural development issues, livelihood security and development. The results revealed that responses to Radio received 52.34%, Farmer’s groups/association/cooperative got 37.09%, Extension agent 31.79%, Television received 4.97%, and 1.99% went to social functions.

**Table 4: Sources Where Respondents Access Information (N= 302)**

Sources	Frequency (%)
Radio	158 (52.34)
Farmer’s groups/association	112 (37.09)
Extension agent	96 (31.79)
Television	15 ( 4.97)
Town Crier	59 (19.53)
Others (Social Function)	6 ( 1.99)

Source: Field Survey 2007/08

Focus Group Discussions

Findings revealed that majority of the people do have access to Radio and listen to agricultural and informative programme from time to time. Radio often gives relevance and valuable information. On Farmer’s groups/association/cooperative source, this is where members always seek help when the need arises. The group liaises with institution that can address such problem/limitation if it is beyond their reach, particularly on technical issues. To address technical issues and problems, the group solicit help of experts/resource persons to address these issues/problems.

Limitations confronting effective and useful information from the Town-crier include sole source of receiving information from the Traditional-head/Chief/King in council. Communities are not allowed to have access to Town-crier. Also, the Chief/King in council does not seek what sort information the people want. When irrelevant information was being passed by the Town-criers to the people, they can either cease from listening or grumble. Thus, people/community cannot query it because such information is from the highest authority of the town.

## Conclusions

This study was undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of the channels of information dissemination to rural populace and the extent to which such information meet information needs of the people/community. Having examined the position of the Town-criers, it was discovered that this channel rarely meets the information need of the people, as the study revealed 20% of such information meet people needs. Thus, people/community expectations in terms of meeting their information need was not really met by the use of Town-criers. However other sources where community accesses relevance and useful information are Radio and Farmer’s groups/association/cooperative. Although these channels often do not provide salient and important information bothering on the security and progress of the community. Consequently the use of Town-criers becomes relevance and significant in conveying to the people/community such important information.

The use of town crier can be more effective if the structure and medium of receiving information is enlarged for onward dissemination. This is to accommodate opinions of interactive sessions of the king in council and the people for their respective information and community needs. For technical issues and problems from this interactive session, Town-crier can liaise with institutional information and communication channels such as Library, Media institution, agricultural institutions, Universities, research institutes and government institutions. Town-crier presenting these issues and problems as the case may be to these institutions and brought back available appropriate and useful response. Information/communication channels in Nigeria such as extension institutions have collapsed, there are no effective communication channels in the country again. The small number of extension officers that exists, only congregates at the urban towns, leaving behind those at the rural areas. Thus, the use of town criers in this regard can be used effectively to fill this gap and could also be trained on basic extension work.

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