
ICT PHOBIA AND ITS SOCIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVES TO AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Though the importance of information communication technology (ICT) in agriculture is emerging yet, its contribution and the challenges it poses are knocking at the door of the farmers which is ignited by globalization. There is significant shift from agriculture supply driven to demand driven paradigm in new emerging and changing economics typical of ours here in Nigeria. Hence, it is viewed that future agricultural growth would be information driven, as new information unit reach the ultimate user at the fastest speed to harness its potential benefits as enshrined in the national agricultural policy that emphasis on the use of information technology towards rapid development of agriculture. The information communication technology vision 2020 in respect to agriculture has envisage interalia; that extension and advisory services making use of information technology would be available to the farmers on round the clock basis, the tools for information technology will provide networking of agriculture sector not only in the nation but globally, having a reservoir of data base with a long term vision to bring farmers, researchers, scientists and administrators together by establishing agriculture on line through exchange of ideas and or information. Hence, the paper, underlines that the choice of ICTs should be driven by needs not technology and feedback be obtained on an ongoing basis to assess the users' satisfaction and or otherwise of the technologies impact.

Keywords: *(ICTS), Phobia, Sociology and Agriculture*

INTRODUCTION

The role of information communication technology towards enhancing agricultural development is increasingly being recognized and officially endorsed at the world summit on information society, collaborating this view Paroda, (2003) agreed that at most fundamental level, service provider, researchers, policy makers and practitioners within the dissemination of agricultural information on market development are not meeting the needs of the farmers. In a wide scale study of agro-based enterprises development, participants reported that the largest constraint to livelihoods is access to appropriate information about market development for major agricultural output. It is readily accepted that increased information flow has a positive effect on the agricultural sector and individual firms, however, collecting and disseminating information is often difficult and costly to that effect knowledge and information management is presently one of the most challenging areas of development in developing countries (GUY, 2003) Nigeria is no exception as the ability of the poor to access the means of information transfer such as the internet or computer-based tools is often questioned. (Mensell and When, 1998, Sciadas, 2003). In Africa, studies have shown that ICT training initiatives have high uptake and interest by stakeholders (Sciadas, 2003, Soeftes and Sein 2003,). Information technology (IT) offers the ability to increase the amount of information provided to all

participants in the agricultural sector and to decrease the cost of disseminating the information.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Information and communication technology are sets of technologies that include the use of:

1. Digital communications and specifically satellites, Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM), and Digital Radio.
2. Computers, personal data assistants (PDAS), email, speech recognition technologies, global positioning (GPSs) and internet.
3. Computer assisted distance learning, geographical information systems, as well as traditional media such as newsletters, wireless local loops and rural radio broadcasting e.t.c.

Phobia: The oxford advanced learner's dictionary international students 7th edition defines phobia as a strong unreasonable fear or hatred of a particular thing.

Sociology: Is been conceptualized as a science, which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action to arrive at a casual explanation of its course and effects in a social system.

Agriculture: As the science or practice of farming.

AGRICULTURE AND THE ICT PHOBIA SCENARIO IN NIGERIA

An understanding of the factor associated with information technology adoption and use in agriculture will enable the development of strategies to promote ICT adoption and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of information used in agriculture. It is a known fact that access to information holds the key for successful development. Improved communication and information access is directly related to socio-economic development of any nation. Agriculture is one of the prospective areas in which ICT can effectively be applied particularly for the social and economic development of the Nigerian agrarian community. However, rural population in our country still have difficulties in accessing crucial information in the forms they can understand in order to make timely decisions for better farming, the challenge is not only to improve the accessibility of communication technology to the rural population but also to improve the relevance of information to local development. It is to be noted that in Nigeria the farmer is in no position to use ICT directly. The literacy levels, language barrier as most of the application software are predominantly in English, cost of computers, poor communication infrastructure make it impossible for individual farmers, particularly small farmers to directly adopt ICT. This calls for institutional effort to harness to create the necessary information technology based services to farmers.

POTENTIALS OF ICT IN MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF FARMERS

Information is of limited use, however, unless we packaged and communicate it appropriately. Appropriate, fast, diverse comprehensive and low-cost ICTs can accelerate food production in the continent and bring the invisible farmer into limelight. Zijp (1994) presented an overview of information technologies and their representative application,

requirements advantages, disadvantages and cost. The choice of technology and communication medium largely depends, however, on telecommunication infrastructure available and the users' background.

The choice of ICTs could be driven by needs. Not technology and feed back should be obtained on an ongoing basis to assess the users' satisfaction or dissatisfaction and the technology's impact. Farmers needed to become sensitive to differences in ICTs to appreciate their potentials to increase agricultural productivity, as ICT is generating possibilities to solve such problems of different categories of end users thus, Giovanetti, and Bellamy (1996) pointed out that illiterate farmers also require repackaged and audio-visual information products. ICT can help to provide the information on the likely price distribution of key commodities over the coming years. Such information helps farmers and traders make decisions on when and in what ways to market their grain. Whether, to sell at harvest or store on farm in anticipation of higher prices later in the season. When combined with enterprise budget data, the information can also be used in deciding which crops to produce in the coming season.

IMPLICATION OF ICT PHOBIA TO AGRICULTURE; A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Today, information is conceived as important resource that contributes immensely towards the development of a nation especially in this era of information explosion. It is an asset and a resource for development of communities, government agencies and the target population. Information is essential for facilitating agricultural development thereby bringing about social and economic change. Accordingly, Maningas, et.al. (2000), submitted that information within the hands of the farmers means empowerment through control over their resources and decision making process. It has been generally agreed by scholars that rural communities in Africa have invariably lagged behind in terms of any meaningful development which is attributable to planners, developers and government non-acknowledgement of the role information; as a basic resource or unawareness of its potential value (Neelameghan, 2006). Lack of access to adequate and right information at the right time to the rural communities undermines the efforts at improving the living conditions of the rural people by both government and non governmental organizations. Having access to the right information can address major problems that hinder rural community and it can improve chances for livelihoods. Okiy, (2003) express that rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in the process. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligation to become better informed citizens. Thus, information, if well packaged and disseminated will exterminate ignorance, poverty as well as enlighten them on how to achieve economic, social, educational, political, agricultural and cultural objectives of the society.

CONCLUSION

It can be rightly stated that the importance of ICT in the field of agriculture is emerging, as it has just started to spread its shoots, but with its immense potentials to standardize and regulate the agricultural processes and solve the problems, it is sure that ICT will be one of the most important areas in the near future for agricultural advancement. It is hoped that information technology will bring a highly developed agriculture by its

worthwhile contributions to the society by narrowing down the enormous gap between the researchers, farmers and indeed all relevant stake holders in the agricultural sector. It is suggested that the farmers are to be made aware of the utility of the internet and other related information regarding information technology as enunciated in the information technology vision 2020.

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