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# PRIORITIZATION OF FARMERS' NEEDS IN THE THREE AGRICULTURAL ZONES OF ABIA STATE FOR EXTENSION SERVICE

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## ABSTRACT

*The study focused on the prioritization of needs of farmers in the three agricultural zones of Abia State, Nigeria, and challenges to extension services. It identified the major crops and animals raised by farmers in the area, examined farmers' needs, and identified the challenge to extension services in the zones. Multistage random sampling was used in selecting 180 respondents in the study area. A structured questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were used in eliciting information from the respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentage, frequency, and mean score were employed in data analysis Results showed that cassava was the first in the crop ranking among the three agricultural zones, while poultry was the first in the animal ranking, followed by goat, sheep, and pig production. The most available labour was household members. Male farmers had more access to hired labour than females. Farmers need storage facilities ($\bar{x}$ =2.8), processing equipment ($\bar{x}$ =2.5), and farm inputs ($\bar{x}$ =2.3). Challenges of the farmers were, lack of access to credit facilities ($\bar{x}$ =2.4), extension advice ($\bar{x}$ =2.1), pest and disease attack ($\bar{x}$ =2.1), and adequate land ($\bar{x}$ =2.1). The study recommended that government should provide credit facilities and farm inputs to farmers to harness the needs and challenges of the farmers to improve production and their standard of living.*

***Keywords:*** *Farmers' Needs, Farming challenges, Extension services*

## INTRODUCTION

Farmers' priorities simply mean farmers' needs in order of importance when needs are being determined. It is essential that distinctions are made between needs, wants, and interests. Needs refer to something considered necessary or required to accomplish a purpose. Want on the other hand is desirable or useful but not essential (Kanu and Obioma, 2021). Interest indicates an individual's concern or curiosity about something. It is not unusual for individuals to confuse needs, wants, and interests. Therefore, extension personnel has taken efforts to assess target population needs and prioritize them, and by so doing farmers' points of view are taken into account in the study of farmers' needs and priorities. The objective is to reconnect farmers' priorities and concerns with agricultural research in the study area. Farmers' organizations should identify their needs (priorities) so as to open a solid proposal for agricultural production. Farmers' priorities are largely neglected in defining agricultural research thus the failure of many agricultural projects (Mazza, 2018) in view of this farmers' opinion counts for the successful transfer of agricultural technologies as it's based on their priorities. Technologies based on their needs attract higher productivity and food security and higher adoption. In order to overcome these problems and increase the productive capacity of farmers, the government should encourage farmers through the dissemination of technologies based on their priorities as these would increase their yield, and quality products and alleviate poverty. The study, therefore, examined the prioritization of farmers' needs in the three agricultural zones of Abia state and determined the challenges to extension services. Specifically, it also examined the socioeconomic character of the respondents in the study area and the means score analysis of the farmers' priorities in the adoption of technologies.

## METHODOLOGY

Abia state is located in the southeastern region of Nigeria and lies within approximate latitudes 4040 and 6014 North and longitude 7010 and 80 East (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005) and its population is over 3,727,347 (NPC, 2016). Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in Abia State. Subsistence farming is prevalent in the state, and about 70% of the population is engaged in agriculture. The main food crops grown are cassava, maize, yam, rice, and cocoyam as well as cash crop such as oil palm, cocoa, and rubber among others.

The study was conducted in Owo-ahiafor, Emede-Ubani-Ibeku, and Akoli-imenyi communities in the three Agricultural zones (Aba, Umuahia, and Ohafia) of the Abia State. The State was purposely selected because it's one of the host States where MOUAU disseminated its technologies.

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was applied to get useful information from the respondents. A simple random sampling technique was used to select two blocks from the three agricultural zones. Three circles were randomly selected from each block and ten farmers were randomly selected from the list of farmers in each of the selected circles. This gave a sample size of 180 farmers. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentage, frequency, and mean score.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Farmers

Results revealed that the majority (58.3%) of the farmers were female. Results also revealed that farmers in the study areas were within the age range of 40-49 years and the mean was 40. The implication is that given an adequate level of farming resources, the farmers have the potentials to maximize farm output. Results also showed the mean household sizes of 7 persons (61.1%) in Abia State indicating a relatively large household size. The implication is that larger household size can provide labour at least cost. Results further showed that the majority (43.3%) of the farmers had secondary education as their highest level of education. This implies that they can adopt innovation in Agriculture. The result further revealed that 48.3% of the farmers were widows/widowers and 39.4% were married; it means a high percentage of widow/widower and married farmers are into agricultural production and implies availability of labour in Abia state. The results further revealed that 80.6% of the farmers were Christians.

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

| **Variable** | **Aba zone** | | **Ohafia zone** | | **Umuahia zone** | | **Mean** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Sex** | **F** | **%** | **F** | **%** | **F** | **%** | **%** |
| Male | 14 | **23.3** | 10 | **16.7** | 7 | **11.7** | **17.2** |
| Female | 30 | **50.0** | 35 | **58.3** | 40 | **66.7** | **58.3** |
| Youth | 16 | **26.7** | 15 | **25.0** | 13 | **21.7** | **24.5** |
| **Total** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Gender Participation in Agriculture** | | | | | | | |
| Male | 12 | **20.0** | 8 | **13.3** | 5 | **8.3** | **13.9** |
| Female | 30 | **50.0** | 32 | **53.3** | 40 | **66.7** | **56.7** |
| Youth | 18 | **30.0** | 20 | **33.3** | 15 | **25.0** | **29.4** |
| **Total** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Age** | | | | | | | |
| 20-29 | 10 | **16.7** | 7 | **11.7** | 11 | **18.3** | **15.6** |
| 30-39 | 10 | **16.7** | 13 | **21.7** | 10 | **16.7** | **18.4** |
| 40-49 | 22 | **36.7** | 25 | **41.7** | 25 | **41.7** | **40.0** |
| 50 and above | 18 | **30.0** | 15 | **25.0** | 14 | **23.3** | **26.1** |
| **Total** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Household size** | | | | | | | |
| Less than 5 | 20 | **33.3** | 11 | **18.3** | 18 | **30** | **27.2** |
| 5-9 | 30 | **50.0** | 40 | **66.7** | 40 | **66.7** | |
| 9 and above | 10 | **16.7** | 9 | **15.0** | 2 | **3.3** | **11.7** |
| **Total** | 60 | 100 | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Level of education** | | | | | | | |
| No formal education | 5 | **8.3** | 3 | **5.0** | 7 | **11.7** | **8.3** |
| Primary | 20 | **33.3** | 20 | **33.3** | 20 | **33.3** | **33.3** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Secondary | 25 | **41.7** | 30 | **50.0** | 23 | **38.3** | **43.3** |
| Tertiary | 10 | **16.7** | 7 | **11.7** | 10 | **16.7** | **15.0** |
| Total | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Marital status** | | | | | | | |
| Not married | 10 | **16.7** | 7 | **11.7** | 5 | **8.3** | **12.2** |
| Married | 20 | **33.3** | 21 | **35.0** | 30 | **50.0** | **39.4** |
| Widow/Widower | 30 | **50.0** | 32 | **53.3** | 25 | **41.7** | **48.3** |
| Total | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | 60 | **100** | **100** |
| **Religious beliefs/practices** | | | | | | | |
| Christian | 46 | **76.7** | 50 | **83.3** | **81.7** | **81.7** | **80.6** |
| Muslim | 3 | **5.0** | 2 | **3.3** | **6.7** | **6.7** | **5.0** |
| Traditional | 11 | **18.3** | 8 | **13.3** | **11.7** | **11.7** | **14.4** |
| **Total** | **60** | **100** | **60** | **100** | **60** | **100** | **100** |

**Source: Field Survey, 2021**

**Crops and Livestock Production in the Study Area**

The most important crops grown by farmers in the study area were cassava, melon, maize, vegetable, yam, kola nut, plantain, banana, oil palm and pineapple, cocoa, mango, and orange among others. Most of the crops were grown for food (50-100%). For livestock production, the people reared goats, poultry, sheep, pigs, fish, and even dogs. About 90% of them were into goat farming which was on a small – scale

**Table 2: Crops and Livestock Production in the Study Area**

| CROPS | POOLED% | RANKING | RELATIVE IMPORTANCE FOR FOOD (0-5) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cassava | 100 | 1st | 4 |
| Maize | 95 | 2nd | 4 |
| Melon | 90 | 3rd | 4 |
| Pumpkin | 80 | 3rd | 4 |
| Okra | 75 | 4th | 4 |
| Cocoyam | 70 | 5th | 4 |
| Beans (Akidi) | 68 | 6th | 4 |
| Melon | 66 | 7th | 4 |
| Ukpo | 60 | 8th | 4 |
| Sweet potato | 50 | 9th | 4 |
| Plantain | 50 | 9th | 4 |
| Yam | 50 | 9th | 4 |
| Pineapple | 30 | 10th | 4 |
| Oil palm | 25 | 11th | 2 |
| Cocoa | 20 | 12th | 2 |
| Orange | 15 | 13th | 2 |
| Mango | 10 | 14th | 2 |
| **LIVESTOCK** | | | |
| Goat | 90 | 1st | 2 |
| Poultry | 80 | 2nd | 2 |
| Sheep | 70 | 3rd | 2 |
| Piggery | 40 | 4th | 2 |
| Fishery | 20 | 5th | 2 |

**Source: Field survey, 2021**

**Prioritization of Farmers' Needs in the three Agricultural Zones of Abia State**

From Table 3, the prioritized farmers' needs in the three agriculture zones were funds, improved inputs, extension experts' advice, affordable processing machine, storage facilities, infrastructure, farm labour, good road network, regular supply of water, and early supply of farm inputs.

**Table 3: Prioritization of Farmers' Needs in the three Agricultural Zones of Abia State**

| Farmers' Needs | Aba Zone(%) | Ohafia Zone% | UmuahiaZone (%) | Pooled (%) | Ranking |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fund | 98 | 90 | 94 | **94.0** | **1st** |
| Improve Inputs | 90 | 85 | 80 | **85.0** | **2nd** |
| Extension experts' advice | 80 | 77 | 78 | **78.3** | **3rd** |
| Affordable processing machine | 70 | 71 | 72 | **71.0** | **4th** |
| Storage facilities | 69 | 65 | 60 | **64.7** | **5th** |
| Infrastructure | 60 | 58 | 55 | **57.7** | **6th** |
| Farm labour | 60 | 55 | 54 | **56.3** | **7th** |
| Good road network | 50 | 52 | 53 | **51.7** | **8th** |
| A regular supply of water | 47 | 45 | 43 | **45.0** | **10th** |
| The early supply of farm inputs | 40 | 39 | 36 | **38.3** | **11th** |

**Source: Field survey, 2021**

**Mean Score Analysis of Constraints of Farmers in the Three Agricultural Zones of Abia State**

Table 4 shows that the major constraints of the farmers in the three agricultural were funds, improved inputs, storage facilities, infrastructure, and land. These posed serious challenges to extension services in the study area.

**Table 4: Mean Score Analysis of the Challenges of Farmers' Priorities in the Three Agricultural Zones of Abia State**

| Farmers Priorities | Farmers' priorities (Response) | | | | Score (∑x) | Mean ($\bar{x}$) | Priorities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SA | A | D | SD | | | |
| Storage facilities | 200 | 150 | 90 | 57 | 497 | **2.8** | **1st** |
| Processing equipment | 180 | 140 | 120 | 16 | 456 | **2.5** | **2nd** |
| Access to credit | 100 | 200 | 89 | 36 | 425 | **2.4** | **3rd** |
| Farm inputs | 150 | 30 | 120 | 105 | 405 | **2.3** | **4th** |
| Extension experts' advice | 250 | 50 | 20 | 50 | 370 | **2.1** | **4th** |
| Pest and diseases | 199 | 90 | 45 | 36 | 370 | **2.1** | **4th** |
| Inadequate land | 160 | 100 | 40 | 70 | 370 | **2.1** | **4th** |
| | 90 | 70 | 20 | 100 | 280 | **1.6** | **5th** |

**Source: Field survey, 2021**

Decision rule= 2.0

SA - strongly agree

A- Agree

D- Disagree
SD- strongly disagree

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The farmers prioritized their needs based on mostly the need for higher productivity. It also exposed those who need external aid either from the government, NGOs, or other bodies.

The findings from this work have shown that there are many needs of the farmers which are prioritized. These needs were funds, improved inputs, storage facilities, infrastructure, and land. Extension services are arguably the most pervasive in order of ranking. Fund ranked 1st, improved crop varieties 2nd, and inputs 3rd respectively. It was also concluded that the farmers in the study area are ready to increase their production to solve the need for food production, increase income and improve their standard of living and food insecurity in the country.

Prioritization of farmers' needs is a critical and major area that needs immediate attention. It will lower production if not checked. Based on the conclusion of this work, the following recommendations were made:

- There was a unanimous opinion of farmers that funds ranked 1st and as such government should provide them with soft loans and access to credit
- Extension services should be more available to visit and disseminate recent technologies and organize more training based on farmers' needs to enhance their productivity.
- Government should supply early and improve inputs, credit facilities, storage, processing machine, and good infrastructure for maximum production and a higher standard of living.

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