

## **The reception to the agricultural communication strategies employed by the government and its effect on farmers in South Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPRS), Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

This research is about farmers' reception to agriculture-related information that they watch, hear, and read from various sources and its effect on agriculture development and thereby farmers. This thesis explores the agricultural communication strategies and the reception of farmers in SNNPRS, Ethiopia. Specifically, the research dealt with the communication strategies employed by the Agriculture and Natural Resource Development Office and examined how farmers reciprocate to the agricultural messages through different channels. The research also sheds some light on the institutions' challenges in passing the information to the farmers. The study has employed a descriptive survey type of research design using a mixed approach. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to collect data from the field. The findings revealed that extension agents (EAs) are the primary means of disseminating agricultural messages to the farmers. The findings also concluded that the importance of local radio in the communication process was rated insignificant.

**KEYWORDS:** Communication, Agricultural communication, Ethiopia

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Agricultural communication is conceptualized as an interactive process through which information, knowledge, and skills relevant for development are exchanged between farmers, extension agents, information providers, and researchers either personally or through media such as television, radio, and print (Benedict, 2010). Agricultural extension service in Ethiopia gets operated with agricultural extension personnel who go door by door to spread the latest farming trends. The governments also use the mass media to reach thousands of farmers in one go. These mass media programs educate the farmers on new farming methods to improve their production efficiency and their economic and social standards. Essentially, agricultural communication provides farmers the scientific knowledge to solve their problems by themselves with minimum intervention from the government. It helps the farmers learn other alternatives that exist in farming to choose the best practice for themselves (Oyekunle, 2011).

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Agricultural communication has become an essential tool to achieve Ethiopia's development goals and, hence, emphasize fostering it through rising popular participation, media institutions, and rural agricultural extension systems are developing

in Ethiopia (WCCD, 2006). Ethiopia's current trend shows that the country is striving towards achieving an accelerated sustainable development, giving priority to modernization and commercialization of agricultural production. This goal is possible through raising popular participation and swift transfer of modern technologies (OSSREA, 2011). Thus, the need to put in place participatory, effective agricultural communication has become mandatory. To this effect, efforts have been underway to foster agricultural communication by establishing rural extension at the village level. The media institutions that focus on disseminating the agricultural information are now conducting live training programs for the farmers (Kassa and Abebaw, 2004). Therefore, this study explored agricultural communication tools used in dissemination and farmers' reception in SNNPRS, Ethiopia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Since Agricultural communication is a recently identified discipline, its theories blend communication, public relation, social marketing, psychology, and other related fields. In this regard, Santucci, F (2007) argues that it is a multidisciplinary approach that depends on various study areas like "interpersonal communication, public relations, public advocacy, community mobilization, professional communication, and constituency relations. Hence it is believed that the theories of Agricultural communication amalgamate from various fields of social and natural studies. By the 1900s, agricultural communications had evolved into a highly competitive industry requiring knowledge of business practices (farming) and editorial skills (Burnett & Tucker, 2001). A significant development fueling competition in the communications marketplace was introducing new media for news and entertainment, including movies and radio in the 1920s (Evans & Salcedo, 1974).

Baran, S.J. (2012) noted three distinct levels of stratification in the Agricultural industry. These are the researchers, policymakers, and extension agents, and the farmers. Oyekunle (2011) defines agricultural communication as the effective transfer of Agricultural Technological Innovations and messages from Technology Developers e.g., Research Institutes, Universities, and Private Organizations. To the technological utilizes or the farmers. Balogun (1990) explained that there is no doubt that our research institutes have developed a formidable array of improved production techniques, improved seeds varieties, and fabrication of hands tools and simple machines. This knowledge should reach the farmer to adopt the knowledge, and thus the role of communication in forging this linkage cannot be over-emphasized. Dissemination of information using the right communication technology is crucial if the receiver must make meaning out of the messages received. Ijeoma(2011) noted that as long as there is a continued imbalance in the diffusion of agricultural information and wrongful targeting of information, the possibility of harnessing the full potentials of the rural populace towards attaining sustainable and holistic national, rural and agricultural development will remain problematic and in limbo.

In Ethiopia, public agricultural extension services have been in action for about half a century. Ethiopia has the most extensive agricultural extension system in Sub-Saharan Africa and the third-largest in the world after China and India (Swanson and Rajalahti, 2010). Even though the history of broadcast media in Ethiopia is relatively old, its

development has been slow until the last decade, with both governments' expansion and private media have been noted. Radio stations, mainly FM stations, have tremendously increased, and private and government institutions are considering installing community radio stations. All in one way or another way deal with issues, especially agricultural extension and rural development (Kirub, 2008). The newspaper publishing is about a 100 years old venture in Ethiopia. However, the readership is limited to the cities due to a lack of education in villages.

## RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive survey research design was employed for this study to ascertain and describe the characteristics of the variables' interest in the situation (Kothari, 2008). This research design is followed because it often uses visual aids such as tables to better understand the data. It is also used to explain agricultural communication strategies and reception by farmers. The study employed mixed methods using both qualitative and quantitative data. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), triangulation refers to using qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the nature of a research problem fully. To fully understand the agricultural communication tools used and the reception of messages conveyed through these tools by the farmers, a mixed-method was used.

The primary data for this study was collected through both primary sources and secondary sources. As for the primary sources, information was collected from sample households living in the selected target area (kebeles), and it included both quantitative and qualitative information. The quantitative data were collected through questionnaires, while the qualitative data was gathered through interviews. Deacon(1999) suggests that observation is a critical qualitative research technique, especially for studying mass-communication. Therefore, field observation of institutional setup and facilities in training centers was done at each selected kebeles. Supportive information to the primary sources, secondary data related to institutional issues concerning the management and feedback system of communication, and other demographic data from pertinent to the local governments were also gathered.

The sampling procedure is when the study population respondents were selected from the total population to achieve the research objective. The researcher used a multi-stage sampling technique. At the first stage of sampling, one special woreda i.e., Basketo, from the list of zones and special woredas found in the region was purposively selected for this study due to ease of access to information. In the second stage, the researcher used a systematic sampling technique to select six kebeles from 33 kebeles found in the special woreda. The households from the six selected kebeles were selected using a systematic sampling technique (N/n). Finally, 250 households with a contingency from the six selected kebeles were selected from the study's following target population. Interview Data collected was collected purposively with the six agricultural office heads and one extension communication expert for the information's reliability. The interview followed a semi-structured format to allow emerging questions during the interview while at the same time, saving the researcher from losing focus. The sample size estimation was made using Morgan Krejcie and Morgan (1970)

Quantitative data were analyzed statistically. The quantitative data were entered into SPSS version 1.5, coded, cleaned, and verified. Descriptive statistics tools such as tables, charts, frequencies, and percentages were used to present the questionnaire's data. A qualitative approach is used for the analysis of the interviews and data observation. All the data from the interviews were tape-recorded, and also handwritten notes were taken. The recorded data were then transcribed and translated into English since the data were collected in Amharic and Basketogna. After that, according to the research questions or themes, these answers were grouped. Field observation was taken with the help of a check-list prepared for the same purpose, and some were recorded in still and movie pictures, and finally, the findings were analyzed qualitatively using narration for triangulating.

## DATA ANALYSIS

To understand the availability of the different communication tools in the research area, data was collected and explored. 109 (43.9%) had access of telephone, 58 (23.3%) of the respondents had access to radio, 26(10.5%) of the farmers had Television access, 26(10.5%) had access of getting newspapers, 19 (7.8%) all media access and 10 (4.0%) had access of getting magazines in the area. This indicates that most of the farmers had telephone accessibility, particularly mobile phones, daily. The mobile phone is the latest communication tool in many areas used as a radio when they are inside the fields. During the field observation, the researcher observed that the farmers had mobile phone access for calling service, and some had to listen to songs. However, even if the mobile phone is available in most areas, its service is not of admiration because of the lack of electricity, costs to charge the phone(around five birrs each time), and network connectivity.

Similarly, radio has a significant role in broadcasting information on different international, national, and local issues, but the frequency of radio accessibility was 58 (23.3%) in the area. Most of the study area farmers were not lucky to own a radio and suffer from getting adequate information. According to the qualitative data collected from interviewee when explaining radio usage in the area, one of the respondents said:

*"With the problem of electricity, some of us go about with our small transistor radio (using batteries) to get information and entertainment" (Personal (interview 2019).*

Besides the above, the frequency of accessibility of television was also rare in the area. The interview data also came up with shreds of evidence that further clarified that ownership of TV was absent. Their response also threw light on the lack of electricity in the area; most farmers go to town in the market days and watch TV there. As the researcher observed during fieldwork, getting a TV in rural Kebele is no easy task. Dabtsa Dalkinsa village has installed one TV set from the study area, arranged to operate by the solar system. It is sponsored by the Woreda Government Communication office in collaboration with the Regional Government Communication Affairs Bureau.

### Effect of Radio News and Agricultural Programs on Farmers

Respondent's reception of agricultural messages through radio news and programs was analyzed. From 248 respondents, the majority of 183 (86.6%) of the respondents

disagreed that the office provides them information through radio. In comparison, 43(17.3%) of respondents agreed that the office had provided them information through radio news and programs, and 15(6%) of respondents were unable to recall. This indicates that the production of radio programs and news related to agriculture was not given high importance. This also raises doubt if the radio frequency does not reach the farmers, and the disseminated information might have been carried away by the current affairs and other political news. This was supported by the claim by all the Extension Agents and the Agriculture Officer when interviewed, they said

*"There is no access to getting to the target population through the radio. We heard that there is a transmission of radio in our local language, and most of the time, reporters come to us and interview on seasonal activities, but we cannot listen to it"(personal interview,2019).*

#### Effect of Television News and Agricultural Programs on Farmers

In determining television news and programs to reach farmers, out of 248 respondents, the majority of 205 (82.6%) of the respondents disagreed on getting information through television news and programs. 26(10.5%) of the respondents were unable to recall it, and 17(6.8%) of respondents agreed that they were getting agricultural messages from television. This indicates that the accessibility of television programs and news concerning agricultural messages was rare in the study area. During the field visit, the researcher also observed very few televisions in the locality, which was supported by the in-depth interview conducted with the agricultural officers. Many said

*"On the national level, there are many programs related to agriculture, and the same is retelecasted in local channels; however, the access to television is minimal in the study area due to financial difficulty" (personal interview,2019).*

#### Effect of Extension Agent's Direct Communication on Farmers

Reaching farmers through kebele extension agents to spread information and train farmers received a great response. Out of 248 respondents, most 213 (83%) of the farmers said they were getting information through Kebele agricultural extension agents. Only 18 (7.3%) of respondents were unable to recall the visit of the extension worker. In contrast, 17 (6.8%) respondents disagreed that they were not getting agricultural messages from extension agents. This shows that the useful communication tool to disseminate agricultural messages to the farmers is through the extension agents. Furthermore, during the field visit and interaction with the farmers, the researcher understood that extension agents are doing an excellent job in the area. One of the statements is detailed below.

*"We get plenty of information from the extension agents, and this allows us to have one on one discussion with them. Nevertheless, sometimes professionalslack timeliness." (Personal Interaction, 2019).*

#### Effect of Training Program Communication on Farmers

The data collected to understand the effect of agricultural training on farmers proved that it was an effective communication strategy employed by the government. The majority of the respondents, 208(83.9%), indicated that they were getting sufficient information through training. 32(12.9%) respondents were unable to recall a training program where they were invited to, while 8(3.2) of the respondents indicated they were not getting information from training programs. Furthermore, this was elaborated by the officer:

*"The training centers were mainly built for the farmers to get better information and grasp knowledge directly from the experts in the field, technology providers, or agents" (personal interview 2019).*

The researcher also observed that Extension Agents organize training for farmers to demonstrate the new methods or techniques to reap good production. The personal interview data also has proof of the same. Their response in this regard is stated below:

*"Despite good feedback from the farmers, there is little attention given to funding the training program. We are unable to produce training materials with limited funds. We need much emphasis to be exerted on the government on these issues. We need different communication tools like white screens, projectors, laptops, and other types of equipment that help for easy understanding of agricultural messages to the farmers (personal interview 2019)*

Reception by the farmers after receiving agricultural information through any channel

To understand farmers' reception on the message received from the prominent communication tools, post communications' effects were analyzed. It evaluated the after effect and actions taken by the farmers after receiving the information. In determining actions taken by farmers after getting agricultural messages from Extension Agents, the majority 105(42 %) of the respondents do nothing, and 103(41 %) were discussing the message with their families, while 33(13%) of respondents personally decide to apply the advice or message received. This indicates that most of the respondents receive the messages but do not take measures to implement it to their farms.

The qualitative data collected from farmers' interviews revealed that extension agents had done their part in training the farmers to sow Teff( Ethiopian crop) in the latest and modern methods called broadcasting. They have detailed the process and talked about the advantages like less labor and minimal physical strain. They have also explained that this process could eliminate the increase of labor and back pain to the sowers. Despite the merits learned through the information received from the extension agents, farmers still follow the traditional method to sow the crop. (Personal Interview 2019).

Reception to training programs and their effect on farmers.

The data collected proved that the trainers gave little emphasis on two-way communication; rather, it was a top-down model that was followed during the training programs. Out of 248 respondents, most 182(73 %) of the respondents disagreed that the trainers gave them time and permission to talk on issues rose during training, and 36(14.5) of respondents were unable to recall if they got a chance to speak in the meetings. Only 30 (12.08%) respondents agreed that agents allow them to interact during

the meetings freely. This shows that agents do not give freedom to the discussion on issues. It was also observed that the majority was under the pressure of the trainer's domination, and they were not freely communicating with the trainers and sharing their opinions on modern agricultural methods. This was also supported by the explanations of the farmers interviewed.

*“The Trainers come to us with different agricultural agendas. During the meetings and discussions, they support in favor of the agenda, neglecting the ground reality. If we raise contrary ideas and unclear issues, they stop us there and consider us opponents of technology. We do not have any other option to share our thoughts”. (personal interview 2019).*

The field observation supported the above assertion and found that there would exist a top-down and authoritative communication in such an environment where there is no possibility of democratic participation. Therefore this could lead to the participants neglecting the training programs and merely rejecting the information received. Therefore it is also evident that the messages would not have won acceptance by the farmers.

#### Challenges that prevent farmers from reception to agricultural messages

Despite the government's several communications initiatives, it was observed that the message does not reach the farmers to the fullest. Out of the total target population, 90(37.9%) attribute to illiteracy problems, lack of electricity, lack of access to any media channels, and inadequate agricultural programs on radio and television. Out of which, 44(17%) respondents replied that it was due to lack of electricity and lousy signal that they could not watch television and listen to the radio and 42 (16%) of respondents linked it to illiteracy. In comparison, 29(11.7%) respondents said that it was due to inadequate agricultural programs on radio and television and 22(8.9%) respondents linked it to lack of access to media channels. Additionally, 17 (6.8%) claimed that the bad roads prevent extension workers from reaching the communities on time, preventing them from getting adequate, timely information. Responding a similar idea, the Extension Agents explained that,

*"In disseminating the agricultural message to the farmers, they rely solely on home visits due to the absence of any media outlet in the area like radio and television. Therefore it is difficult to convince farmers towards accepting new ideas" (interview, 2019).*

#### CONCLUSION

From the study, it was evident that the reception of agricultural information to farmers in limbo. Communication tools like electronic media (i.e., radio, television) and the print media (i.e., newspapers, magazines, brochures) have not proved efficient since the farmers either do not get access or cannot own one to receive the message to the fullest. Therefore, it can be concluded that the mass media are not significant enough to disseminate agricultural information to farmers in Ethiopia.

The extension agents' direct visits have proved to be effective in communicating the latest trends in cultivation. However, the agents cannot persuade or convince farmers to follow

and adapt to modern techniques and technology. Farmers still prefer to use the traditional methods of cultivation despite the difficulties. The training programs organized by the local government seem to be a top-down model, which many farmers are not comfortable with. They refuse to accept and feel that the government's agenda being pushed on them without understanding the ground reality and practical difficulty. It can be understood that the institutional structure of agriculture was not fostering agricultural communication in the study area to the satisfaction of the farmers.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the government needs to pay more attention to improve the communication process through effective planning and implementation of agricultural communication strategies for the farmers. For instance, more agricultural programs need to be on-air both on radio and TV; the introduction of brochures, newspapers, farm magazines, posters, audiovisuals, billboards, and short films can help farmers, extension agents, and trainers. The institutional capacity and infrastructure for training need to be improved with adequate communication tools like accessories, generators, projectors, smartphones, and other support mechanisms. The habitual top-down approach relationship between the trainers and local farmers should be avoided for better relationship building. It is evident that Ethiopia's agricultural development programs' success solely depends on the quality of communications and the availability of the mass media to the farmers.

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