Studies a random sample of ten agricultural libraries and their collection to determine their role in the dissemination of agricultural information to agricultural information-seekers in Nigeria.

An assessment of the collection and services offered revealed that agricultural libraries in Nigeria disseminated information to seekers mostly through document loan and reference services.

Provision of photocopying and modern computer-assisted information services, which would facilitate information dissemination, remains a rarity.

INTRODUCTION

Practical benefits derived from agriculture include sustainable food production and over-all economic development, factors that are of strategic importance to all nations. Developed and developing countries alike, recognize the importance of agriculture by according it the priority it deserves.

Nigeria, a developing country with over 100 million inhabitants, most populous in Africa, derives about 70% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from agriculture which is the occupation of majority of the population. Hence, the importance of agriculture to the country cannot be over emphasised. Agriculture has been given a lot of attention since Nigeria’s colonial era, ie, 1914-1960 up to the present time. Successive federal and state governments have endeavoured to improve on agricultural policies, projects and practices, in order to increase agricultural production.

Over the years, the government has established several agricultural institutes, colleges and universities with supportive agricultural libraries, or collections. This has been to promote the study, teaching and research in agriculture. The institutions and their libraries generate and disseminate agricultural information or knowledge to agricultural extension workers, researchers, teachers, students, farmers as well as to policy makers in government.

Agricultural information can be in coded (documented) form or uncoded (oral) form. The dissemination of agricultural information is vital to improve agricultural production because it is a media through which people get acquainted with new and better farming methods, fertilizers, improved seedlings, modern pest control measures, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. The role agricultural libraries play in the dissemination of agricultural information in Nigeria forms the basis of the study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Documentary sources and direct observation were the major methods used in collecting information for this study. Gleaning documents, books, journals and reports from various libraries provided a lot of information on the existence and state of the art of agricultural libraries/collections in Nigeria.

General information on the types of services offered by agricultural libraries was largely gathered through direct observation of the activities of ten randomly selected libraries which were visited on different occasions for a period of nearly 2 years. Additional information on the problems
encountered by the libraries was derived from discussions that ensued during the visits between the researcher and the officials of the following libraries.

- Lake Chad Research Institute Library, Maiduguri
- University of Maiduguri, Agrovet Library
- Borno State College of Agriculture Library, Maiduguri
- Veterinary Research Institute, Jos Library, Vom
- University of Jos Library, Jos
- University of Nigeria Library, Nsukka
- University of Ibadan, Agricultural Library
- International Institute of Tropical Agricultural Library, Ibadan
- Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria Library, Ibadan
- National Horticultural Research Institute Library, Ibadan

A few terms used in this study require definition to avoid ambiguity.

Agricultural Information denotes “knowledge” or “fact” in the field of agriculture.

Agricultural library collection or documentation centre are synonymous and mean a collection of knowledge materials, especially books, journals and reports pertaining to agriculture. The collection may be a definite entity, like in many agricultural research institutions, or within a larger library collection like that of a university library.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Agricultural libraries collections are important sources of agricultural information in Nigeria. Except rural farmers who frequently acquire information through daily verbal exchanges with fellow farmers [1], other agricultural information seekers in Nigeria, heavily rely on documented sources stored in libraries. By supplying this latter group including policy makers, students, agricultural extension workers, teachers, and researchers agricultural documents such as books, journals, reports, agricultural libraries provide the users coded agricultural information. The same group of agricultural information seekers also frequently get supplementary information from both verbal and non-verbal sources during meetings, workshops, conferences, formal conversations on corridors and through written correspondences exchanged among colleagues (termed the invisible college).

There are, in Nigeria, as many agricultural libraries as there are agricultural colleges, universities or institutions which may work on general agriculture or specialise in areas like Veterinary Science, Fisheries, Forestry, Crop Science, Entomology, Horticulture etc.

The Agricultural Information Centre: A World Directory [2] lists 36 agricultural libraries/collections or documentation centres under Nigeria. This figure is however low and unrealistic because firstly there is National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) Library, Umudike, Umuahia, in addition to the eleven agricultural institutes/departments listed by World of Learning (1990) and secondly Niang et al [3] and Aina [4] have included the IITA Library, which is the biggest and international in scope.

However, the eleven major institution are:

- CRIN (Cocoa Research Institute of Nigeria) Ibadan
- FMST (Federal Ministry of Science and Technology) Abuja
- FRIN (Federal Research Institute of Nigeria) Ibadan
- IAR (Institute of Agricultural Research) Zaria
- IAR & T (Institute of Agricultural Research and Training) Ibadan
- IITA (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture) Ibadan
Agricultural Libraries and the Dissemination of Agricultural Information in Nigeria

Besides there are the libraries of the three federal universities of agriculture:
- University of Agriculture, Makurdi
- University of Agriculture, Abeokuta
- University of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia

In addition to the above, most of the thirty three remaining conventional and technical universities that exist in Nigeria offer agricultural degree programs and have supportive agricultural libraries or collection.

Furthermore, many of Nigeria’s 36 states have colleges of agriculture with libraries and or polytechnics and colleges of education that have sizeable agricultural collection in their college libraries.

Therefore, agricultural libraries/collections in Nigeria have actually much more than documentary sources alone reveal.

FUNCTIONS OF AGRICULTURAL LIBRARIES

Agricultural libraries derive their functions from the objectives of their parent institutions. They are established to play an important role in the achievement of the training or research objectives of their parent institutions through the provision and dissemination of agricultural information. They play this role by performing the following functions or activities [4].

- collection, organisation and provision of information materials in general agriculture or particular area of specialisation as well as in allied subjects
- receiving and disseminating technical reports and information
- reference, queries services, inter-library loan service
- literature search
- current awareness services such as distribution of accession lists, content pages of journals, selective dissemination of information (SDI) service, and
- provision of photocopying service

The present study and other studies like Nzotta [5], Ibehwe [6], Gregorio and Sison [7], French [8], Harris [9] and Adedigba [10] have however shown that most of the agricultural libraries do not perform the above mentioned functions effectively as many are offering only the conventional reference and document loan services. They stock mostly documents-books, journals and reports which they make available to information seekers either for consultation or loan. This document-supply-service provided by the libraries is the principal source of information for agriculturalists in Nigeria. Other avenues of acquiring agricultural information, such as conferences, seminars, workshops, meetings, correspondences and corridor interactions, though important, are irregular and unpredictable in Nigeria due to economic and other factors.

Photocopying service is available only in large university libraries and a few others. The library of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) is however an exception. It offers all the services mentioned above. It also provides agricultural information in non-paper-based formats such as audio visuals, compact discs and computers [11, 12]. Other agricultural libraries are yet to be modernised and computerised. Nonetheless, agricultural libraries in Nigeria take care of a major part of the information needs of agricultural information seekers in Nigeria. Even
though their services are limited, their holdings represent the core of knowledge in agriculture which has stood the test of time.

PROBLEMS OF AGRICULTURAL LIBRARIES IN NIGERIA

Document supply by agricultural libraries is however constrained by many factors, which are:
- poor bibliographic control of agricultural literature especially technical reports. Lack of comprehensive and up-to-date lists hinder the availability of materials for acquisition by libraries [13].
- confidentiality of some agricultural reports limit their availability
- poor funding of agricultural libraries limits their acquisition of many relevant materials. Economic recession in Nigeria, since the 1980s, has caused drastic reduction in government grant for institutions and their libraries.
- managements' lack of appreciation of the importance of agricultural libraries in realising parent institutions' training and or research objectives
- lack of formal training in agricultural information, documentation and retrieval

The consequences of the above-mentioned problems hinder many Nigerian agricultural libraries to render effective service to their clientele. The lack of photocopying service in many of these libraries restricts their provision of access to information from documents available with them.

CONCLUSION

There is no minimum standard for agricultural libraries in Nigeria [14] yet provision of access to agricultural information for training, research, and policy making is their major role. Constraints notwithstanding, the libraries are unique since their holdings constitute invaluable core literature in agriculture in the country. Their provision of access to agricultural information through documents forms the basis of all serious agricultural inquiry.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cognizant of the prevailing economic recession in Nigeria, the following modest recommendations are made in order to improve the effectiveness of information provision by agricultural libraries:
- provision of a photocopying machine within the library to support document supply service
- training of librarians working in agricultural libraries in modern computer-based information, documentation and retrieval techniques so that they can readily produce lists, bibliographies and Indexes even with computers in another section of their organisation. Support for training in agricultural documentation can also be sought from governing bodies and from international agencies such as the International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists (IAALD) and the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA).
- Substantial additions to library stock can also be made by aggressively exploring acquisition of materials through exchange of publications among libraries and solicitation of gifts from major international institutes and organisations such as:

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<th>CTA</th>
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<tr>
<td>FAO</td>
<td>Food and Agricultural Organisation</td>
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<td>IITA</td>
<td>International Institute of Tropical Agriculture</td>
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