CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Agriculture is an important economic sector, since it provides income and food for a large segment of the population in developing countries. It plays a key role in the socio-economic development of many developing countries. For Agriculture to play these key roles successfully, farmers need to be properly informed in order to take rational decisions with respect to the adoption of improved agricultural technologies.

According to FAO (2000), much information is unavailable or inaccessible particularly to poor farmers, many practical lessons have been learnt but not shared and there are few opportunities for dialogue to enable concerns to be resolved. The agricultural sector needs technologies that can make information available and easily accessible to farmers and agricultural professionals. Hence, the accessibility to information which is made readily available by ICTs has helped in molding our altitudes towards life as there is more information about certain aspects of life including the agricultural sector (Spore, 2004).

The term Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) refer to hardware, software, networks and media for collection, storage, processing, and transmission in the formats of voice, data, text, and images (World Bank ICT Glossary Guide). As such, the nature of ICTs is diverse ranging from telephones, radios, and television to more technologies such as internet technologies, mobile telephony, computers and databases. This diversity means that they can be used by people with varying degrees of skills, although the current trends towards sophisticated applications are more and more demanding on the end users. The primary purpose of ICTs is to provide an enabling environment for the generation of ideas, their dissemination and use. Through ICTs, the diffusion and sharing of knowledge is enabled through open access to information and better coordination of knowledge. ICT facilitates the creation of networks locally, regionally and globally.

Farmers require information to link various inputs at reasonable prices and also link output markets. (Adekunle et al 2004). A combination of the two may increase farmer’s income. (Arokoyo, 2005) noted that a strong extension linkage complimented by flawless information flow enhanced by the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) will significantly boost agricultural production and improve rural methods in developing countries. The role of ICT is also recognized in millennium development goal no. 8 (MDG 8), which emphasizes the benefits of new technologies especially information and
Agricultural professionals are scientists, researchers and extension worker who have been trained in various disciplines in agriculture and rural development. They play the critical role of linking technology sources to technology end users, that is, the farmers. This definition goes beyond the traditional role of extension workers to include assessment and articulation of farmers’ technology needs, research and development of new technology testing and evaluation of new technology and transferring it to farmers. In particular, agricultural professionals have a crucial role to play in bridging the technology gap that exists between the existing scientific knowledge base and information and knowledge in the hands of farmers. The institutions that engage the personnel provide facilities which could enhance the performance of their duties as research and extension personnel.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The ICTs involve the use of many electronic based communication systems such as computers, radios, televisions, Global System of Mobile communication (GSM). It is obvious that it is new in agricultural extension and rural development (Omotayo, 2005). Agricultural professionals use ICTs for data processing, access of agricultural related information for (experimentation) and dissemination to farmers. The agricultural professionals in different types of institutions no doubt have need and have been using ICTs, for various activities. International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), for instance as an international institution, in order to achieve her mandates of generating proven technologies across African countries require ICTs to enhance performance of staff. This also applies to National Horticultural Research Institute (NIHORT) and Oyo State Agricultural Development Programme (OYSADEP) which have national and state mandates respectively. Considering the importance of ICTs to agricultural research and extension, this study therefore assessed the access and use of ICTs by the agricultural professionals in Ibadan, Oyo State. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are increasingly seen as essential tools in development projects that can create new sources of income, make governments more transparent and accessible, improve education and health care, and overcome social exclusion and discrimination. To harness these potentials, multinational hi-tech corporations are forming public-private partnerships with governments, development institutions and civil society organization in the delivery, of ICTs to the rural masses.

Kiplangat (2003) affirms that ICTs have become a driving force in development, providing a means of narrowing the information gap between developed and developing countries and among their communities. The accessibility to information which is made readily available by ICTs has helped in molding our altitudes towards life as there is more information about certain aspects of life including the agricultural sector (Spore, 2004).
Agriculture in Africa if revitalized properly can drive the wheels of rural economy and to some extent even the urban economy as the urban dwellers depend on rural farmers for food. Rural farmers whom the majority is small-scale farmers contribute about 80% to the region’s food basket. However, these farmers are faced with constrained market access, which includes physical access to markets and lack of information. It is difficult for the farmers to market and achieve commodity exchanges if communication is encumbered. Limited access to market due to lack of information on available markets is retarding development in rural areas. Therefore, it becomes very difficult for small-scale farmers on developing countries to penetrate the international markets. In short, the big markets determine the prices without considering the high production costs incurred by the less advantaged subsistence farmers in developing countries.

The study, therefore, provided answers to questions such as

What are the personal characteristics of agricultural professionals in Ibadan?

What is the level of awareness of ICTs by the agricultural professionals?

How accessible are the ICT tools among the agricultural professional?

What is the extent of the respondents in the use of ICTs for identified activities by the respondents?

What is the competency of the respondents in the use of ICTs?

What are the factors militating against the use of ICTs by the respondents?

What are the factors motivating the use of ICTs by the respondents?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study was to assess the access and usage of ICTs among agricultural professionals in Ibadan, Oyo state.

The specific objectives include to;

examine the personal characteristics of the agricultural professionals;

assess the level of awareness of ICTs among agricultural professionals in Ibadan;
determine the accessibility of ICTs tools among these professionals;
determine the extent of use of ICTs for identified activities among agricultural professionals;
determine the competence of respondents in ICTs usage;
examine the factors militating against the use of ICTs tools; and
examine the factors motivating the use of ICTs tools;

1.4 HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of respondents and access to ICTs.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of agricultural professionals and the use of ICTs.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of respondents and competence in the use of ICTs.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the professionals in the institutions with respect to accessibility to ICTs.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the respondents in the institutions with respect to the use for technical activities.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between professionals in the institutions with respect to competence in the use of ICTs.

1.5 JUSTIFICATION/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study was primarily necessitated by the benefits inherent in using information and communication technology by agricultural professionals to reach the farmers. There is a need to exploit strategies for effective and timely delivery of information to farmers.

The suggestions from the study could enhance effective and timely dissemination of improved agricultural technologies to farmers which would boost agricultural production.

This study will be of great relevance and concern to the agricultural researchers, extension workers, policy makers and government agencies that have the mandate to improve
agricultural extension delivery in the country and specifically in IITA, NIHORT and Oyo ADP. The study will be of great relevance to policy makers, as it will help in the formulation of policies concerning information dissemination in the agricultural sector, having revealed the actual information and communication technologies (ICTs) accessed and used by the agricultural professionals.

Agricultural professionals are scientists, researchers and extension workers who have been trained in various disciples in agriculture and rural development.

ASSESSMENT OF THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) AMONG STAFF OF AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTIONS IN IBADAN MUNICIPAL AREA, OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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