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Physical Distribution Activities and Farm Products Availability in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract*:* This study examined the effect of physical distribution activities on farm products availability in Emohua local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.The objective of the study was to examine the effect of Physical distribution activities of rural farmers in their bid to make farm products available to the market. The study adopted cross sectional survey design with a structured questionnaire. The sample size was determined with Taro Yamane's formula because the total population of the study is known. Therefore, judgmental sampling technique was used to contact 392 rural farmers in the four zones of the local government area.The data collected were analyzed with simple linear regression analysis with the aid of SPSS software. The result shows that transportation and distribution channel structure significantly affect farm product availability while, storage facility and theft of miscreants are the major conditions for farm products decrease in the area. We therefore, recommends that both federal and state government including private and corporate bodies should engage in planning and come up with a comprehensive scheme for nation-wide provision of modern storage facilities and bulk warehousing for the rural farmers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Physical Distribution, Farm Products Availability

1. Introduction

Agriculture is the dominant business. It is often reported that more than 70% of the population is engaged in it. Before the discovery of oil in Nigeria, agriculture had remained the main stay of the country's economy, contributing over 90% of its foreign earnings. The anchor points were palm oil, cocoa, groundnut and timber. Its fortune started to decline when oil boom came in the 1970s. In 1975, the sector's share of total earnings slumped to a meager 4.4% ([1] 1999:16).

Nigeria's is blessed with agricultural fertile land which has resulted in the establishment of farms all over the country. These farms are cultivated by rural farmers who employ rudimentary methods such as slash and burn system, fallowing and rotational cropping. The rural farmers most times do not obtain good returns on their investment as a lot of them struggle to recoup the capital invested in the business.

In the past, farm produce was meant for personal consumption and inter-household exchange and thus primarily subsistence in nature. This system made no room for specialization because rural farmers produced what they needed. This system is usually referred to as barter.

As noted by [1] (1999:17) poor funding of farm business is considered to be responsible for the reliance of investors in the sector on rudimentary cultivation, low productivity and degrading environment. Farmers lack funds to acquire large farmlands, buy modern farm equipment/inputs and secure sophisticated storage facilities.

However, in modern economies, emphasis is on division of labour and specialization resulting in increased productivity. These outputs must be made available to end users, for meaningful exchanges to take place. To accomplish this role, physical distribution becomes essential.

Physical distribution involves the handling and movement of raw materials and finished products from producers to the consumer. It is a set of activities concerned with the physical flows of materials, components and finished products from producers to channel intermediaries and consumers.

[2], (2010) posit that physical distribution function covers a range of activities directed towards efficient and effective movement of various sizes shipments of products by the various transportation agencies from several sources of supply to an almost unlimited number of points of destination. Major decision areas in physical distribution include how to transport shipments, storage facilities and inventory management. In

Nigeria, studies have shown that farmers experience a lot of challenges moving their produce from the farms to where there is demand for them ([3], 2008; [4], 1997). It is also evident that most agricultural produce are perishable items and require special transportation mode as well as storage facilities. With the emergence of a knowledge-based economy and advancement in technology, it is ripe for rural farmers to consider integrating physical distribution activities into their programme to effectively move and store their farm produce.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Marketing practitioners have spent significant efforts and financial resources on keeping products continuously available on shelves and have considered product availability as a central feature in triggering sales ([5], 2009; [6], 2011, [7], 2009). Simply put, if the product is not available, it cannot be sold.

According to report by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Nigeria's efforts toward food sufficiency is seriously threatened by low yields, poor infrastructure, lack of access to equipment, storage and preservation, limited technology transfers and lack of low-interest credit. Inadequate storage facilities have resulted in 60 percent post-harvest loss of perishables. All these call for an integrated approach.

In Nigeria, most farming activities takes place in the rural areas where there is no basic infrastructure. Government efforts in recent times have been directed towards attaining food sufficiency. This target will not be achieved if local farmers cannot move their farm produce effective from the farms to the Urban market. This study was designed to investigate the effect of physical distribution strategies on farm produce availability in Nigeria.

1.2 Objective:

The major objective of this study is to investigate the effect of physical distribution activities on rural farmer's product availability in the urban market in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study's specific objectives are to:

i) ascertain the effect of mode of transportation on farm products availability in the market
ii) examinethe effect of storage facilities on farm products availability in the market.
iii) findout the effect of distribution channel structure on farm produces availability in the market.
iv) determinewhat is responsible for decrease in farm products availability in the area.

1.3 ResearchQustions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were developed:

1. To what extent does mode of transportation influence rural farm products availability in urban market?
2. In what way has storage facilities affected rural farm products availability in urban market?
3. To what extent does distribution channel structure influence rural farm products availability in urban market?
4. What is responsible for decrease of farm products in the area?

1.4 Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were developed to guide the study:

Ho_1: There is no significant effect of mode of transportation on rural farm product availability in urban market.
Ho_2: There is no significant effect of storage facilities on rural farm products availability in urban market.
Ho_3: there is no significant effect of distribution channel structure on rural farm products availability in urban market.
H_{04}Theft of miscreants do not affect decrease on farm product in the area

2. Literature Review

Physical Distribution is the key factor that link a producer with its customers. It is an out bound logistics, where the products coming out of the company's production line (i.e., finished goods) are made available to the intended markets so that the products can command economic value. The process of making goods available to their various markets involves physical distribution activities.

Physical distribution is defined "as the set of business activities which is designed to move the right amount of the right products to the right places or markets, in proper condition, at the right time and at reasonable costs". ([8], 1998).Physical distribution has to do with the movement of finished goods from the point of production to the ultimate consumers or customers ([9], 2002). He further stated that, the activities performed in materials management and physical distributions are similar since they both concern the flow of products, one inward, and the other outwards. [10], (1998) posits that physical distribution is concerned with the actual movement of products and services from the point of production to the point of consumption.

2.1 Transportation

Transportation is the integral part of physical distribution. Transportation is one of the major parts of physical distribution decision of the producer. This decision will determine the mode of transportation to use in moving products through the distribution channel to the market. The producer or the company matches the available mode of transportation with its capability, product and market characteristics. These considerations as well as their related agencies are examined before appropriate transport selection will be made to move the goods to desired place. The mode of transportation are Motor vehicles, Railways, Inland Waterways, Pipeline, Airways etc., cost is an important factor to consider. Other factors are transit time, reliability, capability and accessibility ([8], 1998).

2.2 Storage Function

In physical distribution, storage is often associated with warehousing. In reality, storage takes place at several points, at the retailer, in transit, at the producer's facilities etc. Storage function is the marketing function of holding goods. The amount of goods stored is called an inventory. The producer needs to store goods until they receive orders from purchasers. Wholesalers store products before selling it to retailers. Also, retailers store goods for customers.

However, products might also be stored for the following reasons:

i. Product has outpaced consumption, and the surplus needs to be stored.
ii. Some products, such as agricultural commodities are available only during certain time, storing helps to stabilize prices.
iii. Some purchasers buy items and stored in large quantity to get discounts on their purchases.
iv. Merchandise is stored at convenient locations to meet customers' delivery needs better ([11], 1991).

Thus, storing addstime and place utility to products by making them available when and where customers want them.

2.3 Distribution Channel Structure

Production is incomplete until the goods gets to the consumers for whom they are meant. The man who made the best mouse trap discovered to his chagrin that the world failed to beat the path to his door step. He did not know that he had to blow his trumpet and deliver the goods to the door steps of his customers ([9], 2002). Complacency in distribution is the bane of many companies' today's flows and exchanges. A product can take many routes to reach its final consumer. Businesses search for the most efficient channel from the many alternative channel structure to move their products to the market ([12], 2006). The Channel structure can be consumer products or business to industrial products which can be direct or middlemen and agents. The distribution channel structure involves taking a decision. The decision will involve the company in relatively long-term commitments. To this effect, the business has to carefully gather and study all necessary information which will enable it to take a good decision.

Moreover, firms must be sure that the channel structure chosen is consistent with their products. To achieve this, there are some factors that influence the choice of the channel and the level of distribution intensity appropriate in moving their products to the market ([12], 2006). These factors can be group as market factors, product factor and producer factor.

Also, attention must be given to the level of distribution intensity which include; intensive distribution, selective distribution and exclusive distribution.

However, some scholars' empirical research work shows that transportation, storage and channel structure of rural farmer need serious attention to ensure farm products availability in the market.

[13], (1958) in his study found that, many agricultural products are still confined to village market and will remain so until appropriate transportation facilities make other outlets accessible. [14], (1996) found that rail and road transportation together working in cooperation are responsible for sustaining the increase distribution of product from the farmers. [15], (1966) holds the view that level of losses depends on climate and method of storage and handling as well as on the nature of the community itself. He further noted that substantial number of products can be served through improved storage.

[16], (1972) in his study found that storage involves cost of either work in materials, finance and risks of loses. This cost normally adds to the utility of the products.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted cross sectional survey design. This design involves studies which are done at one or more points in a given time period. It allows the researcher to divide the study population into zones where data can be collected easily from the respondents.

The cross-sectional survey design relies on a sample of elements from the population of interests which are measured at a single point in time. A great deal of emphasis is placed on the scientific generation of the sample so that the members are representative of the population of interest.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consisted of all rural farmers in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, South SouthNigeria. The Local Government has 14 wards with 145 towns and Villages with a total population of 201,057 (NPC, 2006).

3.3 Sample Size/Sampling Technique

The sample size of the study was 400 rural farmers. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. The Taro Yamane's formula is appropriate to determine the sample size when the total population is known. The total population of Emohua Local Government Area is 201,057 as at 2006 National population commission Census. Since, the total population is known (201, 057), we substitute the figure into the Taro Yamane's formula as follows:

Sample size

Where: n = Sample Size Sought
e = Degree of Tolerable error, 5% (level of Significance)
N = Total Population
I = Constant

n =
n =
n = 399.9980105
n = 400

After the computation, we have the total of 400. Based on this figure, the Local Government Area was divided into four (4) zones. Then, 400 copies of questionnaire were distributed as follows; zone (1): 100, zone (2): 100, zone (3): 100 copies and zone (4):100 copies of questionnaire respectively. Out of the 400-questionnaire distributed to the respondents, 394 copies were retrieved representing 98.5 percent (i.e.) zone (1): retrieved 99, zone (2) retrieved 98, zone (3) retrieved 99 and zone (4) 98 to have the total of 394). While six (6) representing 1.5 percent were not retrieved. But out of 394 copies that were retrieved two (2) copies of questionnaire representing 0.5 percent were discarded. The two copies were discarded because they are not completely filled by the respondents. Three hundred and ninety-two (392) copies were useful for the study, hence the sample size of the study. However, judgmental sampling technique was used to contact the rural farmers in the four zones of the Local Government Area.The four (4) zones were divided within the 14 wards of the LGA.

Emohua is a Local Government Area in Rivers State with headquarters in Emohua town. The total population is 201, 057 as at 2006population census with 14 wards which Egbeda, EleleAlimini, Emohua (II) Emohua (II), Ibaa, Obelle, Odegu (I), Odegu (II), Ogbakiri (I), Ogbakiri (II),Omudioga/Akpabu, Rumuekpe, Rumudele and Ubimini.

Emohua Local Government Area is Rivers State East Senatorial District alongside Ikwere, Etche, Omuma, Obio/Akpor, Port Harcourt, Ogu/Bolo and Okrika Local Government Area. Its form a federal constituency alongsideIkwere Local Government Area. The Emohua LGA covers an area of 831 km^2. The Local Government is bounded to the north by Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area and Imo State. To the East, it is bounded by Ikwerre and Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, to the south by Degema and Asari-Toru Local Government Area. To the west by Abua/Odual and Ahoada East Local Government Area all in Rivers State, South-south Nigeria. The Local Government was created in 1991 under the Federal Government administration of General Ibrahim BadamosiBabangida.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed with simple regression analysis. The simple regression analysis was used to test the four (4) hypotheses. The SPSS software was employed to generate the statistical results. The

simple regression is appropriate to test the individual effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

4. Results and Distribution

The simple linear regression analyses were performed to estimate the cause- and –effect of the independent variable (i.e. physical distribution activities) and the dependent variable (i.e., farm products availability). The physical distribution activities dimensions are transportation, storage facility;distribution channel structure and farm produce inventory management. The simple linear regression analysis is appropriate in this study because it is also known as bivariate regression analysis which establishes cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. It is tested by one independent variable as against the dependent variable at a time at 0.05 level of significant**.**

4.1 Hypothesis 1

There is no significant effect of mode of transportation on rural farm product availability in urban market.

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of mode of transportation and farm products availability

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.707[a]	.500	.499	2.23431

a. Predictors: (Constant), TRANSPORTATION

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1946.690	1	1946.690	389.951	.000[b]
	Residual	1946.933	390	4.992		
	Total	3893.622	391			

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY
b. Predictors: (Constant), TRANSPORTATION

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.103	.458		4.589	.000
	TRANSPORTATION	.848	.043	.707	19.747	.000

A. Dependent Variable: Farm Products Availability

Source: Survey Data (2018): Computed by the researcher using data obtained from the respondents of the rural farmers in EmohuaLocal Govt. Area

The result of the simple regression analysis in the model summary table shows that regression co-efficient R-value is (.707) which indicates a positive relationship exist between the independent variable (i.e., transportation and dependent variable (i.e.; farm products availability). The R- Square value (.500) is the co-efficient of determination. This shows the percentage of variation of rural farmers' perceptions of mode of transportation activities accounts for 50 percent of the total variation in farm products availability. The variance in farm products availability that is association with transportation activities is referred to an explained variance. The remainder of the total variance in farm products availability that is not associated with transportation activities is referred to as unexplained variance.

The ANOVA table established the significance of the regression model from which F-ratio value (339.951) indicates statistical significance of the overall regression model. This is statistically significant at (.000) because, it is less than 0.05 level of significant. Since, the probability value (i.e., P-v:000< 0.05), we reject the null hypothesis and accept that, there is a statistically significant effect of mode of transportation on farm product availability in this local government area. The F-ratio is the result of comparing the amount of explained variance to the unexplained variance. The larger the F-ratio, the more variance in the dependent variable that is associated with the independent variable.

Also, the co-efficient table shows the regression co-efficient for transportation the column labeled unstandardized with Beta is (2.103) and standard error (.458). The t-statistics is calculated by dividing the regression co-efficient by its STD error (i.e. 2.103 ÷.458), we have the t-value of 4.589, which also significant at

(.000). This means for every unit that transportation activities improvement increases, farm products availability will increase by .848 units. This result was confirmed by the majority of the rural farmers that indicated strongly agree that road transportation posed some difficulties in moving farm products to the market in the area due to track and untied roads.

4.2 Hypothesis 2

There is no significant effect of storage facilities on rural farm product availability in urban market

Table 2: Simple linear regression analysis of storage facility and farm products availability

sModel Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.915[a]	.838	.837	1.27217

a. Predictors: (Constant), STORAGE

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3262.440	1	3262.440	2015.821	.000[b]
	Residual	631.183	390	1.618		
	Total	3893.622	391			

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY
b. Predictors: (Constant), STORAGE

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.395	.199		12.009	.000
	STORAGE	.787	.018	.915	44.898	.000

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY

Source: Survey Data (2018); Computed by the researcher using data obtained from the respondents of the rural farmers in Emohua Local Govt. Area

The regression result in Table 2 revealed that the co-efficient of the constant term the explanatory variable (i.e.; storage facility) has an R-value of (.915) which indicates a positive relationship between the explanatory variable (storage facility and the criteria variable (farm products availability). The R-square the coefficient of determination value is (.808). This means that 80.8 percent of the variation on the farm products availability can be explained from the independent variable (storage facility).

The F-ratio in the ANOVA table shows the overall regression affect in the model. The F-ratio value is 2015.821 which is significant at (.000), which is less than 0.05 level of significance. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis and upheld the alternative that poor storage facility is one of the factors responsible for decrease in farm produce in the local government area. Hence, hinder the farm products availability in the market. Many of the rural farmers still used Barn storage and Jute Bags as majority strongly agreed that modern storage facility would have been better to sustain their farm produce to a longer time before moving them to the market.

4.3 Hypothesis 3

There is no significant effect of distribution channel on rural farm products availability in urban market.

Table 3: Simple linear regression analysis of distribution channel structure and farm product availability

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.634[a]	.402	.400	2.44340

a. Predictors: (Constant), DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL STRUCTURE

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1565.242	1	1565.242	262.176	.000 [b]
	Residual	2328.380	390	5.970		
	Total	3893.622	391			

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY
b. Predictors: (Constant), DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL STRUCTURE

Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.872	.450		8.612	.000
	DISTRIBUTION CHANNEL STRUCTURE	.710	.044	.634	16.192	.000

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY

Source: Survey Data (2018): computed by the researcher using data obtained fromthe rural farmers in Emohua Local Govt. Area

The result in Table 3 shows that there is a positive relationship between the independent and the dependent variables with R-value of (.634). The R-square which is the coefficient of determination is (.402). This is an indication of the independent variable (i.e. Distribution Channel Structure) in predicting 40.2 percent effect on the dependent variable (farm product availability).

The F-ratio value in ANOVA table is 262.176 which is significant at (.000). Since, the probability value is less than .05 level of significance. We reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that there is significant effect of distribution channel structure on farm products availability.

4.4 Hypothesis 4 Theft of miscreants do not affect decrease on farm products in the area.

Table 4: Simple regression analysis of farm products decrease condition due to miscreants activities and farm products availability

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.832 [a]	.692	.691	1.75366

a. Predictors: (Constant), FARM PRODUCE DECREASE CONDITIONS

ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2694.247	1	2694.247	876.086	.000 [b]
	Residual	1199.376	390	3.075		
	Total	3893.622	391			

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY
b. Predictors: (Constant), FARM PRODUCE DECREASE CONDITIONS

Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.579	.326		4.839	.000
	FARM PRODUCE DECREASE CONDITIONS	.818	.028	.832	29.599	.000

a. Dependent Variable: FARM PRODUCTS AVAILABILITY

Source: Survey Data (2018): computed by the researcher using data obtained from the respondents of the rural farmers in Emohua Local Govt.

The regression result in Table 4 revealed that the regression coefficient of R-value is (.832) which indicates that there is a strong positive relationship between theft by miscreants and total output on farm

products in the area. The R-square value (.692) is the coefficient determination which indicates that theft bymiscreants' accounts for 69.2 percent of the total variation on output of farm products in the area.

We reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that there is a statistically significant effect of theft by miscreants and output of farm products.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, we can conclude that an inadequate or poor storage facility has made the farm products to deteriorate easily and never to last for longer period.

Also, lack of access to good transportation system has hindered farm products availability to the market in the area. Some farmers see vehicles once in a day, while others have to walk many kilometers before getting the products to their destination. In the process some may get damage.

Many farmers do not know distribution channel structure thereby lacking behind in identifying the target customers. Today, they sell directly to the consumers; tomorrow they sell to the petty traders. There is no consistency in their distribution channel structure as for them to engage in properplanning.

The theft by miscreants and poor inventory management practice are responsible for farm produce decline in the rural area of Emohua Local Government.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the above conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

1. Most of the rural farmers do not even have storage for their products, those who have lack the method of preservation. But with planned and comprehensive scheme for good nation – wide storage facilities and bulk warehousing for yam, cassava, plantain, cocoyam including seedlings for replanting could be preserved all the year round. Therefore, effort should be made by Federal and State Government including private and corporate bodies towards the provision of modern storage facilities to the rural farmers in the various Local Government areas in Nigeria.
2. The maintenance of existing roads and construction of new ones are required to link the rural communities in Nigeria.
3. More of agricultural extension officers should be delegated to the rural farmers to demonstrate on the modern way of farming/preservation and define their distribution channel structure and planning, so that local farmers would correct themselves for any mistake done.
4. The Federal, State and Local Government should as a matter of urgent improve on security check to chase out miscreants in the farm land.
5. Rural farmers should engage themselves into co-operative society to increase productivity and the availability of the products to the market at the right time.

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