

Newspaper coverage of agricultural information in Tanzania

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Abstract

This study examined the coverage of agricultural information in Tanzania's newspapers published between 2009 and 2013. Four newspapers—Mwananchi, Habari Leo, The Guardian and Daily News—comprising 840 editions were selected for the study. Data were collected using a checklist and analysed using Microsoft excel and SPSS. The study findings show that of the 63,609 news articles in all the four newspaper editions, only 836 (1.3%) articles were on agriculture. The proportion of agricultural news articles published ranged from 0.79 percent in 2010 to 1.92 percent in 2012. Habari Leo had an average of 61.4 agricultural articles followed by Mwananchi with an average of 39.4 articles. The prominence of agricultural information was as low as 4.9 percent in all the newspapers. It is recommended that the government should formulate and institute policies aimed to increase the coverage of developmental topics such as agriculture in the newspapers.

Keywords: Agriculture, information, Tanzania, newspapers

Introduction

Agriculture is a key sector of economy in Tanzania. The sector generates about 95 percent of the food consumed in the country, contributes about 75 percent of the foreign exchange earnings and accounts for about 27 percent of the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Agriculture is also a major source of livelihoods for about 80 percent of Tanzanians. Furthermore, the agricultural sector has linkages with other sectors such as agro-processing,

provision of raw materials to industries and serves as a market for manufactured goods (URT, 2012; PADEP, 2010). However, the performance of agriculture in Tanzania and many other developing countries is constrained by numerous factors such as the low use of improved seeds and fertilisers, over-dependence on rainfall, reliance on old farming methods, unpredictable and unfavourable weather and climate, poor physical infrastructures such as roads, poor post-harvesting systems, low adoption of research technologies and innovations, poor markets and prices, ineffective implementation of agricultural policies, and weak research-extension-farmer linkages (Kumar *et al.*, 2011). These challenges are often aggravated by inadequate access to relevant and up-to-date agricultural information by farmers, extension workers, researchers, policy-makers and other actors in the sector (Sharma, 2011; Sife, 2014).

Agricultural information encompasses aspects such as the availability and the use of fertilisers and improved variety of seeds and seedlings, feeds, plant protection chemicals, agricultural machinery and equipment as well as information on soils and water availability. It also encompasses information on pests and weed control, harvesting and post-harvest processes and storage, markets and prices, climate and weather, transport facilities as well as credits and loans. Timely access to reliable agricultural information enables farmers to improve their productivity through the deployment of good practices such as timely preparation and planting of farms, increased use of fertilisers and improved seeds and seedlings, reduced input costs, increased sales of agricultural produce, adoption of modern farming equipment and machinery as well as proper processing and storage of crops.

Studies conducted in Tanzania and elsewhere have reported inadequate accessibility to agricultural information by farmers and other stakeholders. According to Mtega and Benard

(2013), access to agricultural information in Tanzania's rural areas is constrained by poor and unreliable communication infrastructure, high illiteracy levels, poverty, lack of electricity, and high costs of information and communication technologies (ICTs) services. Babu *et al.* (2011) identified unavailability of appropriate content, unawareness of available information sources and untimely provisions of information as major constraints in India. In Nigeria, farmers' access to agricultural information is constrained by financial problems, inadequacy of facilities and unavailability of relevant information (Daudu *et al.*, 2009). In Uganda, farmers have low access to agricultural information mainly because of language barriers and the inability to share information (Byamugisha *et al.*, 2008).

The traditional approach of disseminating agricultural information through extension services has also experienced several shortcomings in many developing countries. There have been weak linkages between researchers, extension workers and farmers. In some cases, blame has been heaped on the high ratio of agricultural extension officers to farmers. As such, the majority of farmers remain un-accessed by extension workers. There are also inadequate operating resources and fiscal sustainability. Other agricultural actors such as researchers, policy-makers and the business community also lack access to the necessary agricultural information. This calls for the use of other communication channels such as the mass media to enhance the dissemination and sharing of agricultural information. Mass media are communication channels that can disseminate information to wide audience within a short time. Such media can, therefore, create awareness to the public about particular issues at which many people may easily become informed. According to Oladele and Boago (2011), mass media have been effective in settings outside the reach of the regular extension services.

The majority of people in the developing world still rely on the “traditional mass media” such as newspapers, radio, and television; thus bringing a probability that these three media sources can be effective channels for disseminating agricultural information (Nazari & Hassan, 2011). Furthermore, mass media have the capacity to uplift the knowledge and change people’s behaviour by drawing their attention to particular issues (Hassan *et al.*, 2009; Kayode & Adeniran, 2012). Although radio and television are the quickest types of mass media to reach a wide audience, newspapers have additional advantages of being in permanent form, carrying more information, and often being more authoritative (Aiyesimoju & Awoniyi, 2012). Newspapers are periodical publications containing informative articles, editorial views, analytical articles, advertisements, special reports, pictures and cartoons. Newspapers can also provide sustained and prominent coverage on a particular subject and they are very important in inducing the public to change attitudes, become more aware, increase knowledge and skills, and learn on different topics including those on agriculture. Therefore, newspapers play a noteworthy role of disseminating developmental messages including agricultural information.

Despite the noteworthiness of the role newspapers play in disseminating information to the public, there are concerns in many countries that newspapers tend to prioritise advertisements, politics, entertainment, and crime events while ignoring developmental topics such as agriculture (Narayana & Kumar, 2009). A study carried out in Nigeria revealed that the degree of prominence accorded to agriculture by newspapers was very low. Only 36 (4.8%) out of 750 news items on agriculture were published on the front pages (Okarie & Oyedepo, 2011). In Botswana, Oladele and Boago (2011) reported that public newspapers provided less coverage to agricultural news than private newspapers. Generally, agricultural information has suffered limited coverage in newspapers.

In Tanzania, the number of registered newspapers has increased tremendously in the past few years. By 2014, there were over 800 registered newspapers in the country with varying publishing frequencies. Some newspapers publish their editions daily, some weekly and some monthly (MCT, 2015). Some of these newspapers are government-owned whereas others are private-owned. Some newspapers are published in Kiswahili whereas others are published in English. Although there are general concerns that the coverage of important developmental information such as agriculture in Tanzanian newspapers is low, there is hardly empirical evidence to verify such claims. The present study, therefore, examined the coverage of agricultural information in newspapers. Specifically, the study established the frequency and prominence (the priority given to agricultural news in the newspapers) of agricultural information in the Tanzania's newspapers.

Methodology

A content analysis was carried out in November 2014 to examine the frequency of reporting agricultural issues in newspapers and the prominence given to agricultural issues on newspaper pages. The contents considered included news articles, feature articles, editorial articles, analysis articles, reports, letters to the editors and pictures. Data were gathered from newspaper issues published between 2009 and 2013 obtained from the Sokoine National Agricultural Library, Morogoro Regional Library, Mzumbe University Library, and VETA library in Morogoro. These five years were covered because Tanzania introduced a five-year programme known as *Kilimo Kwanza* (literally Agriculture First) in 2009, which extended to 2013 that provided special emphasis on agricultural development in the country. It was, therefore, expected that various media types including newspapers would have given serious coverage to agriculture to support the programme.

Daily newspapers were first grouped into private and state-owned. A sample of four daily newspapers, two from each category, was purposively selected based on their magnitude of circulation and readership (Allyoucanread, 2014; TMF 2012; MCT, 2010). The selected newspapers were *Mwananchi* and *Habari Leo*, which are published in Kiswahili as well as the *Guardian* and the *Daily News* which are published in English. *Mwananchi* and the *Guardian* are privately-owned newspapers whereas *Habari Leo* and the *Daily News* are state-owned. Newspaper editions were selected in stages for the study. Initially, six months were systematically selected in each year followed by random selection of one week in each month. This brings to 42 days of each year under review that were selected for the study, hence making a total of 210 days for the five years for each newspaper. Finally, 840 newspaper editions were covered in all the five years. Simple descriptive statistics were used to determine the frequency of agricultural information occurrence in the newspapers. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to compare English and *Kiswahili* newspapers as well as making comparisons between one newspaper and another. The Friedman Test, on the other hand, was used to make comparisons among all four newspapers.

Results and Discussions

The study findings in Table 1 indicate that of 63,609 news articles that were published in all the four newspaper editions for five years, only 836 (1.3%) articles were on agriculture. The proportion of agricultural articles published ranged from 0.79 percent in 2010 and 1.92 percent in 2012. This suggests that agricultural information received very little attention in Tanzania's newspapers during all the five years under review. In other words, Tanzania's newspaper role of educating and informing the public on agriculture, which is a very important sector of the economy, remains rather limited. These findings are consistent with

those of other studies (Ovwigbo & Orogun, 2013; Sitton *et al.*, 2001; Okorie & Oyedepo, 2011), which exposed the narrow picture of agriculture in newspapers in various countries.

Table 1: Distribution of agricultural news articles for each year

Year	Newspapers	No. of news articles	No. of agricultural news articles
2009	<i>Mwananchi</i>	2880	24 (0.8)
	<i>Habari leo</i>	2677	64 (2.3)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	3465	14 (0.4)
	<i>Daily News</i>	3542	21 (0.5)
Sub total		12564	123 (0.9)
2010	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3058	24 (0.7)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2616	37 (1.4)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	3528	14 (0.3)
	<i>Daily News</i>	3535	26 (0.7)
Sub-total		12737	101 (0.7)
2011	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3259	35 (1.0)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2933	53 (1.8)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	2936	53 (1.8)
	<i>Daily News</i>	4102	34 (0.8)
Sub-total		13230	175 (1.3)
2012	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3171	71 (2.2)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2701	69 (2.5)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	2784	42 (1.5)
	<i>Daily News</i>	3682	55 (1.4)
Sub-total		12338	237 (1.9)
2013	<i>Mwananchi</i>	2792	43 (1.5)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2599	84 (3.2)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	4311	40 (0.9)
	<i>Daily News</i>	3038	33 (1.0)
Sub-total		12740	200 (1.5)
Total		63,609	836 (1.3)

Figures in brackets represent percentages

Habari Leo had a relatively higher proportion (2.3%) of agricultural articles in all the five years under review followed by *Mwananchi* (1.3%). On average for all the five years, *Habari Leo* had 61.4 articles followed by *Mwananchi* with 39.4 articles, *The Daily News* had 33.8 articles and *The Guardian* had 32.6 articles (Table 2). This is, perhaps, because both *Habari Leo* and *Mwananchi* newspapers are published in Kiswahili which is the lingua franca in

Tanzania. In addition, *Habari Leo* is a state-owned newspaper and is somehow service-oriented. The study findings indicate further that even for the English newspapers, the *Daily News* had a relatively better coverage of agricultural issues than the *Guardian* newspapers. In other words, Kiswahili newspapers, and those owned by the government, have a relatively better coverage of agriculture-based issues.

Table 2: Distribution of agricultural news articles for each newspaper

Newspapers	No. of articles	No. of agricultural articles	Average no. of agricultural articles
<i>Habari leo</i>	13,526	307 (2.3)	61.4
<i>Mwananchi</i>	15,160	197 (1.3)	39.4
<i>Daily News</i>	17,899	169 (0.9)	33.8
<i>The Guardian</i>	17,024	163 (1.0)	32.6
Sub total	63,609	836 (1.3)	41.8

Figures in brackets represent percentages

Comparisons were made on the two categories of English and Kiswahili newspapers to establish whether there were any significant differences with respect to their coverage of agricultural news. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test revealed that there was significance difference ($p = 0.043$) among Kiswahili and English newspapers (Table 3). This confirms the fact that Kiswahili newspapers have a relatively better coverage of agricultural information perhaps because most Tanzanians understand and speak the language. It is also possible that agricultural news is published more in Kiswahili because the majority of the intended audience (farmers) tend to have low literacy levels and understand better in the more accessible language of Kiswahili. With respect to the differences in agricultural news coverage among the four newspapers, the Friedman Test revealed significant differences among the four newspapers (Table 3). These differences denote that every newspaper has its policy and purpose as well as the types of information that get priority in the daily reportage.

Table 2: Comparison of coverage among Newspapers

Variables	Categories	P - value
Coverage of agricultural news by language	Kiswahili	0.043
	English	
Coverage of agricultural news in each newspaper	<i>Mwananchi</i>	0.043
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	
	<i>The Guardian</i>	
	<i>Daily News</i>	

The study also examined whether there were differences between one newspaper and another. The Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test shows that there was a statistically significant difference between *Habari Leo* and the *Daily News* ($p = 0.043$) (Table 4). This difference is, perhaps, a result of the languages used in these two newspapers despite both being state-owned newspapers operating under a similar editorial policy of the Tanzania Standard Newspapers (TSN).

Table 3: Comparison of reporting among newspapers

Variable	Categories	p- value
Newspapers coverage	<i>Habari Leo</i> vs. <i>Mwananchi</i>	0.080
	<i>Habari Leo</i> vs. <i>The Guardian</i>	0.068
	<i>Habari Leo</i> vs. <i>Daily News</i>	0.043

The degree of prominence, which is defined as the priority given to agricultural news in the newspapers, was also examined. The number of agricultural news articles that appeared on the front pages was counted against the total number of agricultural articles. The findings indicate that, of the 836 agricultural articles that were published in the four newspapers in all the five years under review, only 41 (4.9%) got priority by being placed them on the front pages of the newspapers. The proportion of agricultural articles on the front pages ranged from 0.8 percent in 2012 and 11.4 percent in 2011 (Table 5). These findings confirm earlier results from studies such as those of Narayana and Kumar (2009) who found that *Prajavani*

newspaper in India devoted least amount of space on its front pages to agricultural news and almost 93 percent of agricultural stories were published in the inside pages. Similarly, Ifeanyi-Obi and Agumagu (2008) reported that agricultural news was not considered important enough to be published as lead stories in Nigerian newspapers. Usually, publishers of newspapers sell their editions using catchy and well-crafted headlines which motivate readers to buy the papers. These findings suggest that agricultural information is not considered by newspaper editors and owners as important enough to attract the readers.

Table 4: Prominence of agricultural information placed in newspapers

Year	Newspaper	No. of Agricultural articles	No. of articles in front pages
2009	<i>Mwananchi</i>	24	1 (4.16)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	64	3 (4.6)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	14	2 (14.2)
	<i>Daily News</i>	21	2 (9.5)
Sub Total		123	8 (6.5)
2010	<i>Mwananchi</i>	24	1 (4.1)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	37	3 (8.1)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	14	2 (14.2)
	<i>Daily News</i>	26	1 (3.8)
Sub Total		101	7 (6.9)
2011	<i>Mwananchi</i>	35	3 (8.5)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	53	4 (7.5)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	53	8 (15.0)
	<i>Daily News</i>	34	5 (14.7)
Sub Total		175	20 (11.4)
2012	<i>Mwananchi</i>	71	0 (0.0)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	69	1 (1.4)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	42	1 (2.3)
	<i>Daily News</i>	55	0 (0)
Sub Total		237	2 (0.8)
2013	<i>Mwananchi</i>	43	0 (0.0)
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	84	1 (1.19)
	<i>The Guardian</i>	40	2 (5.0)
	<i>Daily News</i>	33	1 (3.03)
Sub Total		200	4 (2)
Total		836	41 (4.90)

Figures in brackets represent percentage

The results presented in Table 6 indicate that the coverage of agricultural information in relation to other topics in all the five years (2009-2013) was very low (1.3%). On average, advertisements and business issues occupied the largest proportion (26.9%), followed by political issues (24.5%), sports and entertainment (21.9 %) and other issues such as mining, tourism and investments (25.3%). Advertisements led the coverage in 2009, 2011 and 2013 in all the four newspapers whereas ‘other’ issues led the coverage in all newspapers in 2012. Political issues dominated the coverage in all the four newspapers in 2010, perhaps, because this was the election year in the country. The results of this study are in agreement with those of Oladele and Boago (2011) who found that the coverage of daily newspapers by both government and private newspapers in Botswana was dominated by advertisements and that agriculture was given little coverage. The results are also in agreement with MCT (2012) report which argues that newspapers in Tanzania cannot survive on circulation income alone without revenue generated through advertisements.

Table 5: Coverage of various topics in newspapers

Years	Newspapers	Total no. of articles	Agriculture	Politics	Advertisements and Business	Sports and Entertainment	Others
2009	<i>Mwananchi</i>	2880	24	824	706	610	716
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2677	64	528	782	560	716
	<i>Guardian</i>	3465	14	579	1193	903	777
	<i>Daily News</i>	3542	21	804	980	845	892
Sub total		12564	123 (0.9)	2735 (21.7)	3661 (29.1)	2918(23.2)	3101 (24.6)
2010	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3058	24	1064	628	557	785
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2616	37	754	601	610	614
	<i>Guardian</i>	3528	14	1127	999	503	885
	<i>Daily News</i>	3535	26	977	851	610	1071
Sub total		12737	101 (0.7)	3922 (30.7)	3079 (24.1)	2280(17.9)	3355 (26.3)
2011	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3259	35	839	835	714	836
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2933	53	657	820	731	672
	<i>Guardian</i>	2936	53	654	994	516	719
	<i>Daily News</i>	4102	34	930	1075	999	1064
Sub total		13230	175 (1.3)	3080 (23.2)	3724 (28.1)	2960(22.3)	3291 (24.8)
2012	<i>Mwananchi</i>	3171	71	788	776	667	869
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2701	69	618	632	704	678

	<i>Guardian</i>	2784	42	665	788	514	775
	<i>Daily News</i>	3682	55	801	967	906	953
Sub total		12338	237 (1.9)	2872 (23.2)	3163 (26.6)	2791(22.6)	3275 (26.5)
2013	<i>Mwananchi</i>	2792	43	690	678	689	692
	<i>Habari Leo</i>	2599	84	636	811	633	535
	<i>Guardian</i>	4311	40	1058	1164	1029	1020
	<i>Daily News</i>	3038	33	618	851	670	866
Sub total		12740	200 (1.5)	3002 (23.5)	3504 (27.5)	3021(23.7)	3113 (24.4)
Total		63,609	836	15,611	17131	13970	16135

Figures in brackets represent percentages

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study findings and discussions indicate that the coverage of agricultural information in the Tanzania's newspapers is generally very low. Similarly, the priority agricultural information gets when it comes to front-page treatment in the newspapers is minimal. On the other hand, to advertisements and business, politics, sports and entertainment, and others issues get more frequency and prominence in coverage than agriculture-based information. Kiswahili newspapers have a relatively better coverage of agricultural information than English newspapers. Also, state-owned newspapers have a relatively better coverage of agricultural information than privately owned newspapers. Therefore, it is recommended that newspaper publishers should deliberately increase the coverage of agricultural news in a bid to foster sustainable agricultural development. The government should also formulate and institute policies that ensure increased coverage of developmental topics, particularly those in agriculture in the newspapers.

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