

ASSESSING THE USE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE IN THE DISSEMINATION OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION IN KOGI EAST, NIGERIA

By

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ABSTRACT

Language which is a visible face of interaction and discussion at any level plays a significant role in the interaction and discussion between rural farmers and extension agents. It is on this strength that this study assessed the use of indigenous language in the dissemination of agricultural information in Kogi East, Nigeria. Data were obtained from 240 rural farmers sampled in two agricultural zones (A and D) using multi-stage random sampling technique. Twenty (25) agricultural extension workers were also used for the study. Qualitative data were obtained from Focused Group Discussion (FGD), participants' observation, and key informant interview. Data were analysed using descriptive and interpretative tools. The findings revealed village meetings (83.8%), neighborhood (78.3%), and relatives (72.9%) as major channels of indigenous communication. Furthermore, there was fair utilisation of indigenous language in the dissemination of agricultural information by both the extension agents and farmers, although there were variations in the frequencies of utilization. In some instances, there is breakdown of communication that arises from the inability of the professionals to communicate the acquired knowledge in a language that is understood by the rural farmers. The research among other things, recommends the need for synergy between linguists and other active players in the extension services to design an improved communication system that is friendly and easily spoken by all for better understanding of messages and optimal performance.

Keywords: Communication Channel, Indigenous language, Agricultural Extension Programmes, Extension Agents, Rural Areas

INTRODUCTION

The contribution of Nigeria's agriculture sector to the nation's Gross Domestic Product and employment rate is not in doubt (Food and Agriculture Organization, FAO, 2018). Agricultural information is capable of boosting farmers' productivity, if such information

is effectively communicated with the farmers. In Nigeria and other developing nations, pieces of information reach farmers mainly through indigenous and exogenous communication channels which include social gatherings, training, meetings, and conferences and followed by learning through direct observation (Melesse *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, the search for appropriate communication channel and language for agricultural information dissemination has been of great interest in recent years.

So far, a lot of research (Fadiji *et al.*, 2014; Anaeto *et al.*, 2013; Arokoyo, 2007; and Agbamu, 2005) has been carried out in the area of agricultural extension services, food production, innovation and technique to improving food production, and empowerment of rural livelihood. In Nigeria, agricultural development programmes serves as a direct link with the farming population. Agro – service centres were created to provide farmers with the required production inputs, while farm settlement schemes were also established to encourage young school leavers take farming as an occupation (Fadiji *et al.*, 2014). Despite the numerous researches, not much has been done on the indigenous language as a critical factor to the development and implementation of agricultural extension services.

According to Elugbe and Omamor (2007), an indigenous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. They further stated that this language is from a linguistically distinct community that originated in the area. Interaction in indigenous language between agricultural extension agents and rural farmers has been observed to enhance social harmony thereby encouraging rural farmers to preserve and improve their inherited means of livelihood (Salau, 2006). According to Oyesonin and Salau (2019), indigenous language is a language that is spoken by a group of people that resides in a locality or region. Sonderling (2009) pointed out that indigenous language plays a major role in all fields of human endeavour because it is a conduit through which people at the rural areas interact and grow their interaction.

Research (Elugbe, 2010; Manyozo, 2004; and Zika, 2006) has proved it that the use of indigenous language to communicate with agrarian groups, particularly face – to- face interaction or discussion, provides the listeners or participants a feeling of belonging. Studies such as Mufivene (2002) and Manyozo (2009) have shown that the use of indigenous language in communicating agricultural messages with rural farmers is the best conduit of mass interaction as it achieves more easily than other foreign languages, better understood, and easy to comprehend by the audience group.

Face – to – face interaction and group discussion are among the methods adopted by agricultural extension agents to share innovations and techniques to local farmers in the eastern part of Kogi State, Nigeria. This exercise is frequently carried out in the rural areas as a means to render assistance and advisory services to rural farmers with the aim of improving farming techniques and productivity. Indicatively, the rural people who are usually farmers have well established communication systems and language through which they traditionally generate, store, share, communicate and utilize agricultural

information. Indigenous language and communication channels provide an effective means for rural communities to access various types of information related to agricultural production activities. Despite the critical role of indigenous communication channels and indigenous language in the dissemination of agricultural information, its practices and prospects are not well studied with respect to the study area. It is on the above strength that this study assessed indigenous communication channels and language in the dissemination of agricultural information in Kogi East, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- i. identify indigenous communication channels used by the respondents;
- ii. ascertain the frequency of use of indigenous language in the dissemination of agricultural information;
- iii. assess farmers' perception on the use of indigenous communication in disseminating agricultural information;
- iv. examine the challenges to disseminating agricultural information using indigenous language

THEORETICAL ANCHORAGE

This study adopted Diffusion of Innovation Theory to explain some key concepts. The proponent of the theory seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread. Everett Rogers, a Professor of communication studies popularized the theory in his book: *Diffusion of Innovations*. According to Rogers (2003), diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated overtime among participants in a social system. The theory was built on four elements: the innovation, communication channels, time, and a social system. The process relies heavily on human capital. Diffusion occurs over a period of time among the members if a similar social system (Ryan and Gross, 1943). Rogers developed five stages to guide communication among participating members of a social system: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption. An individual is at liberty to reject an innovation at any time if that innovation does not conform to his way of life. Abrahamson (2009) examined this process critically by posing questions such as: how do technically inefficient innovations diffuse and what impedes technically efficient innovation from being adopted? Abrahamson (2009) suggested how organizational scientists can more comprehensively evaluate the spread of innovations.

In some of the latter editions of Diffusion of Innovation theory, Rogers changed his terminology of the five stages to: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. The description of the categories however remained similar throughout the editions.

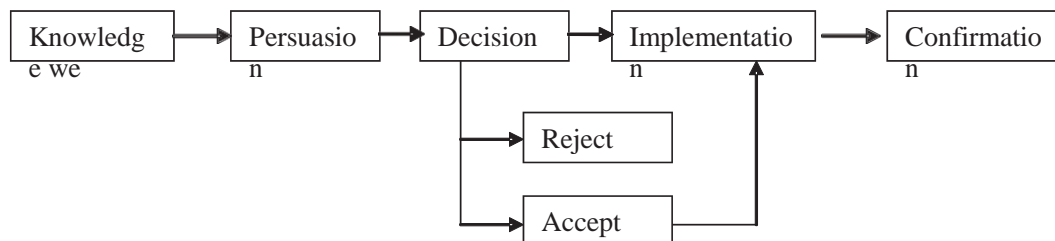


Figure 1: Five Stages in the Decision Making Process

The theory is suitable for the research not only because it has to do with communication majorly, but because it has to do with system of communication. The language we have, to concentrate on, and use as point of departure, or centrally, is indigenous language. For instance, knowledge or innovation transferred to people in the language the best understand tends to diffuss easily than that which come in foreign languages. This language has come to dominate, not just occupy the major discourses in farming settings in the rural areas, but a recognized spoken and culturally used by residents in the rural areas where agricultural extension programmes are designed to cover. To this end, the use of indigenous language is indispensable to achieving the implantation of agricultural programmes in the rural areas.

Indigenous Language: An Overview

It is obvious that people cannot discuss about agricultural development and extension services without language as a considerable critical factor. Obafemi (2008) asserted that “if you imagine today the power of language as a sole vehicle of ethnic identity, in a multilingual country like Nigeria, it will become obvious that language is central to national growth and development”. The question continues to linger as to which language to adopt to propel our nationhood and motivate our citizenship towards development of both urban and rural areas.

An indigenous language or autochthonous language is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous people. This language is from a linguistically distinct community that originated in that area. Indigenous languages are not necessarily national languages (but they can be; English language, which is an official language of Nigeria) and national languages are not necessarily indigenous to the country. According to Okpoku (2009), many indigenous people worldwide have stopped passing on their ancestral languages to the next generation and have instead adopted the majority language as part of their acculturation into the majority culture. Furthermore, many indigenous languages have been subject to *linguicide* (language killing). Recognizing their vulnerability, the United Nations proclaimed 2019 the international year of indigenous languages to draw

attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, and promote indigenous languages.

Elugbe (2007) asserts that for indigenous people, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors. The indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth. According to Degawan (...), the state of indigenous languages today mirrors the situation of indigenous people. In many parts of the world, they are on the verge of disappearance. The biggest factor contributing to their loss is the state policy. Some governments have embarked on campaigns to extinguish indigenous languages by criminalizing their use, as was the case in the America, in the early days of colonization.

Some countries continue to deny the existence of indigenous people in their territories – indigenous languages are referred to as dialects, and accorded less importance than national languages, contributing to their eventual loss. But today, the major influence on the sorry state of their languages is the fact that indigenous people are threatened themselves keeping languages alive. However, with the growing global recognition of indigenous knowledge systems, the hope that indigenous languages will thrive and spread in spoken and written forms is being rekindled to improving the standard of the rural dwellers agriculturally.

Agricultural Extension Services in Rural Areas

According to Togun *et al.* (2007), agricultural extension is a strategy by the government to render assistance and advice to farmers so as to help them improve their methods of production and produce marketing. Agricultural extension is not only aimed at increasing farmers' production level, but also to improve their overall standard of living, particularly, the social and economic life of rural people, who are predominantly farmers.

The field of extension now encompasses a wider range of communication and learning activities organized for rural people by educators from different disciplines, including agriculture, agricultural marketing, health, and business studies.

Agricultural extension according to Fawole (2005) is the application of scientific research and new knowledge to agricultural practices through farmer education. The field of 'extension' now encompasses a wider range of communication and learning activities organized for farmers by educators from different disciplines, including agriculture, agricultural marketing, health, and business studies. According to Saville (1965), the term "extension" has been used to cover widely differing communication systems. It is an informal educational process directed toward the rural population. The extension process offers advice and information to help the rural farmers solve their problems. According to FAO (2019), the extension objective is to change farmers' outlook toward their difficulties; this include physical improvements, economic achievements, and overall development of

the rural populace. Extension agents therefore, discuss issues with rural people to help them gain a clearer insight into their difficulties and decide on way the forward.

Indigenous Language and Agricultural Extension Services

The importance of indigenous languages in agricultural extension services cannot be overemphasized. Linguistic communication is a necessary condition for the existence of human groups. It enables man to achieve a form of social organization. Gbenedio (1994) has identified a dual relationship between language and agriculture – science. While science has influenced linguistics as well as the literary genres in diverse ways; language provides the tools for scientific investigation, report, and dissemination of scientific information. Hence, without science, language cannot be studied as it is today.

It is obvious why developed countries such as China, Japan, and Germany have to use their indigenous languages for almost all their technological terminologies. From this perspective therefore, the relevance of Nigerian languages – Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and a host of others – must take priority in the resolution of illiteracy, since diffusion of new technology, knowledge, and skills are very vital to adequate agricultural production in any country. The emphasis given to the use of indigenous languages in pursuance of growth and development in agriculture, according to Bamgbose (1991) cannot be ignored because, in the author's view, any attempt to do that and concentrate on the of foreign languages is not only to defeat the main aim of mass participation in the sector but also to limit the advantages accruing from foreign industry and investment to a privileged urban elite.

From the foregoing, it does mean that for improved agricultural production in Nigeria, foreign ideas, concepts, and technology which would undoubtedly be imported in foreign languages must be transmitted to the farmers in the language that they understand. We should come terms with the fact that the economic *stride* achieved by countries as Japan, China, and Germany is not based on a widespread dissemination of English or French, rather, it is the result of indigenization of such technology in local languages coupled with the translation of the processes into terms that the ordinary farmers can grasp anytime anyway. Therefore, what those countries mentioned have adopted should be practiced here in Nigeria. It is then that the nation can move towards advancement in agro-technology.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the Eastern senatorial area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The people of Kogi East are dominated by the Igala speaking ethnic group. Kogi East is made up of nine Local Government Areas, namely; Dekina, Bassa, Omalla, Ankpa, Idah, Ibaji, Ofu, Igala-Mela/Odolu, and Olamaboro. Multi-stage random sampling technique was used to select farmers for the study. In stage one, three Local Government Areas were randomly

selected from the study area. The selected LGAs are: Dekina, Idah, and Olamaboro. In stage two, two (2) districts were randomly selected from each LGA, making a total of six (6) districts. In stage three, two (2) council wards were randomly selected from each district, making a total of twelve council wards. In stage four, two (2) rural communities were randomly selected from each council ward, making a total of twenty four (24) rural communities. In stage five, ten (10) farmers were randomly selected from each farming community; making a total of 240 respondents (farmers) for the study. To ensure balanced information, twenty-five (25) extension agents were randomly selected from the 65 extension agents in the study area. In addition to individual respondents, data were collected from 15 focus group discussants and 6 key informants in each LGA. Focus group discussions were arranged in each LGA to triangulate the data obtained through household survey.

The researchers employed mixed (qualitative and quantitative) research approaches. The qualitative data were obtained through focus group discussion (FGD), Key informant Interview (KII), and participants' observation. Quantitative data were obtained through household survey using structured questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in January – March, 2020.

Data obtained were analysed using descriptive and interpretative tools. Descriptive statistics like frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and charts were used to achieve the stated research objectives. On the other hand, the qualitative data were analyzed through narration and description. Management and analysis of the data were undertaken by using Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS version 20.0) software.

Farmers' perfection on the use of indigenous communication channel and the challenges faced by extension agents in using indigenous communication to disseminate agricultural information were assessed using the five point Likert scale and a three point Likert type of scale, respectively. The five point likert scale is given as 5 Strongly Agree (SA) - 5, Agree (AG) - 4, Undecided (UD) - 3, Disagree (DG) - 2, and Strongly Disagree (SG) - 1. The three likert type of scale is specified as: Very Serious (VS) – 3, Serious (S) – 2, and Not Serious (NS) – 1.

The mean response to each item was calculated using the following formula:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum FX}{N}$$

Where: \bar{x} = means response, \sum = summation, F = number of respondents choosing a particular scale point, X = numerical value of the scale point and N = total number of respondents to the item. The mean response to each item was interpreted using the concept of real limits of numbers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Indigenous Communication Channels Used by Farmers

Farming households in rural Kogi east, Nigeria used various indigenous channels to obtaining agricultural information. Figure 2 presents the distribution of farmers according to the communication channels used in accessing agricultural information.

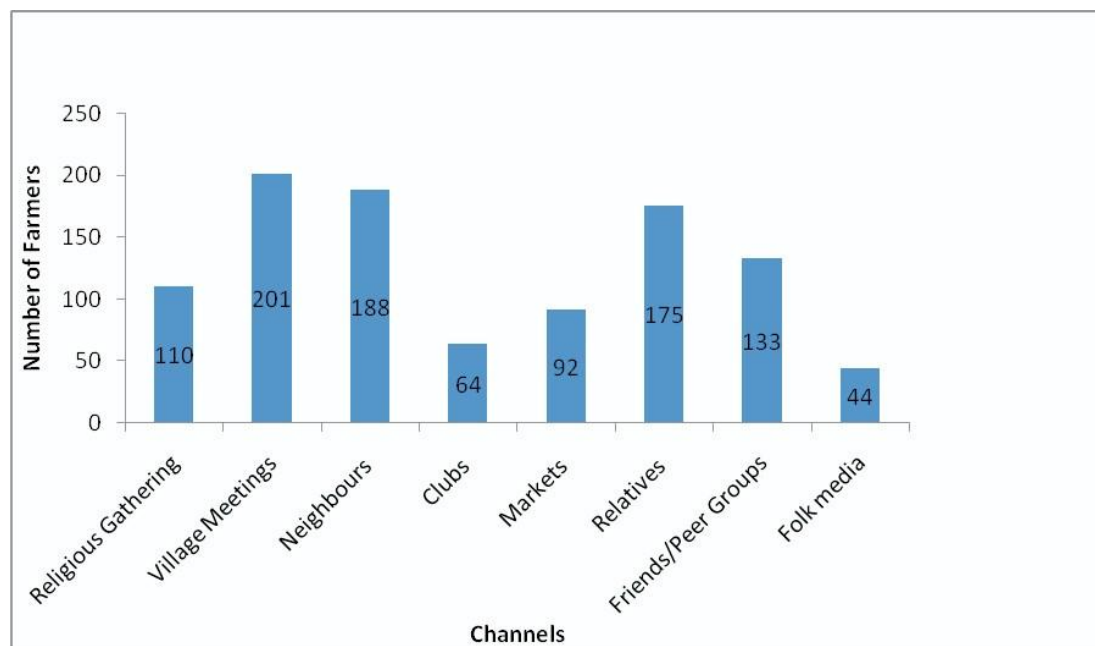


Figure 2: Indigenous Communication Channels Used by Farmers n = 240

Source: Field Survey Data, 2020

The common indigenous channels used by the farmers include village meetings (83.8%), neighborhood (78.3%), relatives (72.9%), and friends/peer groups (45.8%). This survey is similar to the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) conducted in the Local Government Areas. The findings on village meetings rating top did not come as a surprise as most communities in the study area have village square meetings; this involves the gathering of rural farmers or dwellers which gives them the opportunity to discuss issues affecting them; in this instance, agricultural production related activities. Such discussion could lead to an improvement in the method or style of agricultural practice to enhance high productivity. Furthermore, other farmers who could be relatives or friends played significant role in accessing agricultural information.

Figure 2 further shows folk media as the least (18% of the sampled farmers) used indigenous channel of communication. The findings on folk media could be associated with globalization; however, some vital knowledge may go into “extinction” as this

channel of communication is not explored by farmers in the study area. Folk media include information obtained through festivals, plays, puppet shows, dance, song, storytelling, and poetry.

During the group discussion, the group members were familiarized with the discussion area and were expected to identify and prioritize the indigenous agricultural information sources. The group members carefully listed all the available indigenous channels of communicating agricultural messages or information. It was discovered that the rural farmers largely get information on agricultural activities through their village associations or meeting. The advanced rural farmers in their magnanimous attitude, with or without interact with other farmers on how to improve their produce using village meeting platform. The underlying significance of the village meetings in the dissemination of agricultural information is enormous and encouraging.

Use of Indigenous Language in the Dissemination of Agricultural Information

The frequency of use of indigenous language in the dissemination of agricultural information in the study area is presented in Table 1. This information was obtained from both the extension agents or workers and the rural farmers; this is to ensure some reasonable level of fairness and objectivity.

Table 1: Frequency of Use of Indigenous Language in Disseminating Ag. Information

Frequency of Use of Indigenous Language	Extension Workers, n = 25	Farmers, n = 240
Very Often	07 (28)	65 (27.1)
Often	08 (32)	71 (29.6)
Sometimes	09 (36)	79 (32.9)
Never	01 (4)	25 (10.4)
Total	25 (100)	240 (100)

Source: Field Survey, 2020 NOTE: Figures in parenthesis are percentages

The result presented in Table 1 shows almost similar pattern in terms of respondents' (both the extension agents and farmers) response on the frequency of use of indigenous language in disseminating agricultural information. The result revealed that 32.9% of the farmers and 36% extension agents, mentioned that they sometimes obtained and disseminate, respectively, agricultural information using indigenous language, followed by the category of the respondents who noted that they often utilised indigenous language. During focus group discussion, similar pattern was also observed between the farmers and extension workers in all the sampled local government areas. The results also indicated that most responses ranged between “sometimes” and “often”, as shown by 17 (68%)

extension agents and 150 (62.5%) farmers. An interesting aspect is the findings that a fairly significant number, 07 (28%) of the extension agents utilised indigenous language very often in disseminating agricultural information. Furthermore, fewer respondents, in both categories, indicated that they never utilised indigenous language for the purpose of disseminating or receiving agricultural information.

From the focus group discussion and participant observation, it was obvious that the people love their language especially when it is used for something very special and promotive. The dominant *igala* language in the study area is an enigmatic traditional concept which belongs to the people and used to foreground the values and shared beliefs held by every member of the society which the young ones meet and practices as they grow up, as most of the lessons are either passed on orally or through careful observation and practice as children learn the occupation of their parents within their environs. This concludes the reason why indigenous language is often used among the rural farmers and the treasure level of the language cannot be underestimated.

Farmers' Perception on the Use of Indigenous Communication

The distribution of farmers according to their perception on the use of existing indigenous communication in the dissemination of agricultural information is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Farmers Perception on the Use of Indigenous Communication

Perception	Mean Score	Decision
Indigenous communication channels and language are cheaper and readily available	4.1	Agreed
Indigenous communication channels and language are effective in disseminating agricultural information	3.8	Agreed
Information dissemination through Indigenous language is simple to understand	4.8	Agreed
Indigenous Communication channels provides timely feedback	3.5	Agreed
Indigenous communication channels and language offers opportunities for participation by rural farmers	3.7	Agreed

Source: Field Survey Data, 2020

n =240

Table 3 shows that majority of the sampled farmers agreed to all the research items on the use of indigenous communication for disseminating agricultural information. The respondents agreed that agricultural information dissemination through indigenous language is simple to understand. Most of the farming techniques or technologies disseminated through indigenous language are easily adopted by the farmers; this could explain why the respondents were of the opinion that indigenous communication channels and language are cheaper and readily available.

During the focus group discussion, similar pattern was also established across the

sampled local government areas. In *igala* traditional ambience, there exists a long standing system that addresses all aspects of the *igala* people including their farming system. From the data gathered during the participant observation, it was revealed that, to get things done as quick as possible with the rural farmers, do not neglect the use of their language. Comparatively, the people get bored and uninterested when their language is not used as a means of addressing them; they believed, when any language alien to them is used to communicate to them, the people (users of the alien language) have come to shortchange them. So, they feel better at home when their language is used.

Challenges to Disseminating Agricultural Information Using Indigenous Language

The challenges faced by agricultural extension workers in disseminating agricultural information using indigenous language are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Challenges faced by extension workers in using indigenous language

Challenges	Frequency*	Percentage
Low level of communication skills in local dialect	15	60.0
Low incentive for extension agents	22	88.0
Poor knowledge of what to communicate in indigenous language	18	72.0
Poor understanding by farmers	02	8.0
Lack of interest by farmers	03	12.0
Source: Field Survey, 2020 * = multiple responses		n = 25

The available data from the household survey shows that the common challenges faced by extension agents in using indigenous communication channels were low incentive (88%), poor knowledge on what to communicate in indigenous language (72%), and low level of communication skills in local dialect (60%). The low percentage on poor understating and lack of interest by farmers further underscore the relevance of indigenous language communication in disseminating agricultural information.

From the data gathered during key informant interview (extension workers), it was revealed that whenever the agricultural extension worker does not speak the language of the people and there was no one to do the interpretation of whatever he speaks, the purpose of the exercise will be wholly defeated. It was equally observed that some of the agricultural terms have no direct transliteration in *Igala* language and have no substitute to use. This causes delay and mutuality of interaction between the extension workers and rural farmers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Agricultural extension activities are frequently carried out in the rural areas by extension

workers as a means to render assistance and advice to rural farmers towards improving their production methods and output. Consequently, language which is a visible face of interaction and discussion at any level plays a significant role in the interaction and discussion between rural farmers and extension agents. The study concludes that indigenous communication remains relevant in modern day agriculture due to its relevance to farmers' welfare (physical, economic, and overall development). Indigenous information is drawn from various sources such as neighbourhood, relatives, and friends. Hence, interaction and discussion is sustained between farmers and agricultural extension workers by a sustained and continuous generation of message and feedback through either or both linguistic and non-linguistic devices.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is the need for synergy between linguists and other active players in the extension services to design an improved communication system that is friendly and easily spoken by all for optimal performance.
2. Indigenous communication channels should be consciously prioritized by relevant stakeholders as part of agricultural information dissemination package at zonal agricultural extension offices to encourage and facilitate exchange of information by rural farmers.
3. Government and other relevant stakeholders should support the development of indigenous knowledge and same should be included in the national planning process.
4. The setting up of training centres for extension agents as a positive step towards formal coordination, recognition, and implementation/adoption of indigenous communication. Indigenous language should be further strengthened and used more effectively by establishing centre of documentation in the each extension block or cell.

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