Original Research Article

Status Of Postharvest Operations In Upper East Region of Ghana: The Case Of Maize Producers

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ABSTRACT

A baseline survey was conducted in the Upper East of Ghana to assess current postharvest practices and factors influencing long and bulk storage. The research tools employed were field survey, farm visits and key informant interviews. Twenty farmers were randomly selected from each community making a total of 120 farmers. Household structure on average is made up 7±5 individuals, mean age of household heads was 45-47 years compared to their wives 35 to 38 years. Maize is mostly stored in polypropylene sacs and jute sacs on raised platform in household stores. Majority of respondents indicated that post-harvest losses during storage are critical challenges to production and household food security. The main causes of loss were insect pest, rodents and grain moulds. Majority of farmers store maize for 5-8months. Though some local and synthetic grain protectants were used, post-harvest losses in 1 year of storage were still beyond acceptable limits. However, there was high willingness to adopt new efficient methods of crop protection like biological control. The idea of community storage methods was still not a technology farmers may adopt; due to a myriad of socio-cultural reasons. The results of the baseline study will guide the implementation of the project as well as serve as reference point for future impact assessment. Overall, integrated strategies involving clean farm operations, use of appropriate storage technologies and provision of improved storage structures are required to reduce current losses.

Key words: Maize farmers, postharvest losses, storage and biological control

INTRODUCTION

Maize (*Zea mays* L.) has become an important staple food crop in all parts of Ghana. Currently, maize based cropping systems have become dominant in drier northern savanna areas of Ghana where sorghum and millet were the traditional food security crops. According to SRID (2011), maize is the most cultivated in Ghana, occupying up to 1,023,000ha on arable land compared to rice (197,000ha), millet (179,000ha), sorghum (243,000ha), cassava (889,013ha), yam (204,000ha) and plantain (336,000) (SRID, 2012). Currently, Ghana is net-importer of maize even though it has great potential to be self-sufficient and net-exporter. Per capita consumption of maize is estimated at 44 kg/person/year (FAOSTAT, Feb 2013). Declining yields of maize are now observed due to decreasing soil fertility and high cost of fertilizer. Over the last 2 decades, a myriad of maize varieties, cultivars and hybrids have been released. These genotypes possess traits such as early maturing, drought resistance, diseases and pest resistance, striga resistance, as well as additional nutritional values such as quality protein, yellow and sweet corn. Grains of these genotypes possess diverse textural, physical and compositional characteristics which relate differently to light, moisture and temperature as well as susceptibility to pests and disease pathogens; particularly during prolong storage. This requires commensurate postharvest techniques and strategies to contain harvested surpluses. Also, due to intensification and productivity increase, the need for bulk and prolong storage has become critical. This increase can be attributed to government and donor assisted projects such as providing subsidies on agricultural inputs. Nonetheless, current storage methods are suited for small-holder farmers requiring storage of less than 1 ton. Interventions to introduce large storage units such as community warehousing, community grain banks or metal silos which can contain several tons of grain is still constrained by national agricultural policies as well as low adoption from farmers.

Generally, stored maize can be damaged by insect pests if they are not properly conditioned and protected. This challenge may be exacerbated due to cropping intensification and introduction of hybrid cultivars. Maize is harvested towards the cessation of rainy season and stored during the drier months of the year. Maize is often stored on cob in traditional grain silos or shelled into jute and polypropylene sacs with or without protection for storage. However, pest infestation is a perennial constraint; the conditions favorable for grain storage are as well suitable for insect pest reproduction. On-farm infestation of notorious storage pests such as larger grain borer (*Prostephanustruncatus*),lesser grain borer(R*hyzoperthadominica*), maize weevil *(Sitophyluszeamais),* granary weevil *(S. granaries)* as well as mycotoxins accumulation, are a threat in grain storage. Indiscriminate use of common grain protectants such as Actellic (Pirimiphos methyl), bioresmethrin (pyrethroid) phostoxin and Gastox (Aluminium phosphate) is widespread among small-holder farmers (Sugri et al 2010). Most farmers acquire agro-chemicals from non-accredited input dealer without any training on appropriate use. There is the need to integrate production and postharvest practices to achieve quality food for consumers. Integration of good agronomic operations, pest management and appropriate storage techniques to minimize pest damage is therefore very essential. This project seeks to improve agricultural productivity and farm family livelihoods by deploying improved storage and handling practices to reduce postharvest losses of smallholder farmers in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A baseline survey was conducted in 3 districts of the Upper East Region of Ghana to assess current postharvest practices and factors influencing long and bulk storage of maize. The research tools employed were field survey, farm visits focus group discussion and key informant interviews (Chambers, 1993). A purposeful and multi-stage sampling approach targeting maize producing communities and households was adopted. Two communities per district were purposively selected based on their involvement in maize production. Twenty farmers were randomly selected from each community making a total of 120 farmers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information

Table 1-4 provide a summary of the demographic structure of the households sampled. In all, 42% of respondents were female farmers and 58% male farmers (Table 4). Household structure on average was made up of 7±5 individuals (Table 2). The mean age of household heads was 45-47 years compared to their wives whose mean age was 35 to 38 years. The results also showed that migration of household members was not common during the rainy season but up to 10% migrate down south when agricultural activities decline. The observations indicate that most of the household heads (99%) were involved in crop production.

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	50	42
Male	70	58
Total	**120**	**100**

Table 2: Composition and age of households sampled

Description	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Head	HH size	7	3	2	22
	Age (HHH)	47	14	26	78
(N = 120)	Age (WHH)	38	10	18	70
Partner	HH size	7	3	1	17
(wife)	Age (HHH)	45	14	27	75
(N = 120)	Age (WHH)	35	10	19	65

Table 3: Income status of households

Income(GHS 000)	Freq.	%
1-20	31	26.1
21-40	14	11.8
41-60	26	21.8
61-80	26	21.8
81-100	22	18.5
Total	**119**	**100**

Majority of respondents (63%) had no formal education, only 26% had basic education and 10% had post-basic education (Table 4). Livestock rearing is considered as an occupation by very few households (1%). Majority (84.2%) of the respondents were crop farmers, 2.5% were students, a few were engaged in various forms of trade, and only 4% unemployed (Table 5).

Table 4: Educational Status of respondents

Education level	Freq.	%
None	75	63
Primary	15	13
JHS/Middle shool certificate	16	13
SHS/Technical school	12	10
Non-formal	2	1
Total	**120**	**100**

Table 5: Primary Occupation of Respondents

	Freq.	%
Student	3.0	2.5
Unemployed	4.0	3.3
Farmer	101.0	84.2
Teacher	1.0	8.0
Nurse	1.0	8.0
Retired	1.0	8.0
Self employed	5.0	4.2
Pastor	1.0	8
Kente weaving	3.0	2.5
Total	**120.0**	**100.0**

Cropping Systems

Majority (89%) of respondents were engaged in crop production whiles a little minority were involved in animal (7%) and tree (4%) production as the main livelihood strategies (Table 6). Major livelihood crops include maize, sorghum, millet, soybean, cowpea, rice, sweet potato and vegetables (Table 7). Maize is cultivated on up to 4 acresand a maximum land size of 15 acres. The range for cowpea is 2-12 acres, whiles bambara beans, groundnut and sweet potato recorded the least production area of 1, 2 and 2 acres, respectively.

Table 6: Main farming systems in the study area

Farming type	Freq.	%
Crop production	107	89
Tree crop Production	5	4
Livestock marketing	8	7
Total	**120**	**100**

Table 7: Main crops and acreage of production

Crops	Acreage Mean	(Ha) Min.	Max.
Maize	4	0	15
Sorghum	1	0	4
Soyabeans	2	0	5
Cowpea	2	0	12
Vegetable	2	0	3
Pearl Millet	2	0	9
Groundnut	1	1	2
Bambarabeans	1	1	1
Sweet Potato	1	1	2
Total land size of HH	**8**	**1**	**45**

Post-Harvest Operations and Losses

In Table 8 below, 95.8% perceive high levels of post-harvest losses in recent times while 4.2 % of the respondents were adamant. The main causes of damage were insect pests (69.2%), rodents (16.2%) grain moulds (6.7%), weight loss (5.7%) and loss of flavor/nutrition (1.7%). Only 1.7% of the respondents recorded no incidence of post-harvest losses and pest infestation at storage (Table 9).

Table 8: incidence and estimated of postharvest losses under farmer storage

Incidence of produce infestation at storage			Quantities of losses incurred (%)		
	Freq.	%		Freq.	%
Yes (incidence)	115	95.8	0 - 8	29	24.2
No (incidence)	5	4.2	10 – 25	67	55.8
			27 - 60	24	20
			TOTAL	120	100

Table9: Description of major causes of postharvest losses

Main causes of losses	Freq.	Percentage (%)
Insects infestation	83	69.2
Rodents	20	16.7
Grain moulds	8	6.7
Weight loss	5	4.2
Quality (taste/ aroma/colour)	2	1.7
No incidence	2	1.7
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Maize Storage Methods

Table 10 describes the various storage methods used in the study area. Majority of farmers, 40% and 27.3%, store maize in poly-sacs and jute sacs respectively. The use of poly-sacs has gradually replaced jute sacs due to low cost and readily availability. Though, the use of PICS sacs has recently been introduced, only few champion farmers opt for them apparently due to high initial cost. Up to 16.7% of farmers store their maize for 1-4months, 64.2% store maize for 5-8months, and 17.5 store up to 12months (Table 11). Only 1.7% store maize store maize beyond 12 months confirming that they produce in small quantities for subsistence. Only small quantities 1-3bags are stored by 37.5 % of respondents and up to 37.5% store 4-10bags, only about 8.3% stored more than 25bags of maize (Table 11).

Table 10: Maize storage methods

Maize storage methods	Freq.	%	Ranked	Reasons for selection
Bare floor	15	12.6	3	Easy to store, affordability
Stored in jute sacs	33	27.3	2	Availability, durability,
Stored in poly-sacs	48	40.3	1	Availability, durability, low cost
Stored mud silos	10	8.4	5	Common traditional method, regulate grain use
Stored in maize ban	14	14	4	Regulates use of maize/ reduce wastage
Total	**119**	**100**		

Table 11: Duration of maize at storage

Duration of storage			Volume of produce stored		
Storage period	Freq.	%	Bags	Freq.	%
1-4 months	20	16.7	1-3bags	45	37.5
5-8 months	77	64.2	4-10bags	45	37.5
9-12 months	21	17.5	11-25bags	20	16.7
1-2 years	2	1.7	Above 25 bags	10	8.3
Total	**120**	**100**	**Total**	**120**	**100**



Pest Management Strategies Adopted Farmers

The focus group discussions indicated that farmers' prior knowledge on the type, severity and time of pest infestation in different commodities guided their choice of pest management. Table 12 provides a summary of approximate time of pest infestation and management options for different crops. Close 44.2% of the respondents noticed pest infestation within 1-4 months, 33.3% within 5-months, whiles 12.5% noticed no pest incidence. From the group discussions, over 50% of respondents alluded that, except in cowpea and bambara nuts, pest infestation occurred late at 6 months after storage. Farmers therefore applied postharvest chemicals few months after storage or when some level of infestation was noticed. Where storage was anticipated above 4 months, over 50% of farmers used some kind of protection in cowpea and bambara nuts. The use of biological control was not a familiar term; probably this control measure has not been introduced into the area. Only 1.7% of farmers resorted to the use of botanicals such as *neem*products, pepper, *mahogany* bark, *Jethropha*and other local oils. Majority use insecticidal dust (43.3%) and phostoxin (13.3%) for pest management. It was realized that only 1 respondent use ash to actually prevent pest attack. The common grain protectants were *Actellic* (Pyriphos methyl), *bioresmethrin* (pyrethroid) p*hostoxin*, *Gastox* (Aluminium phosphate), *Wander77 powde*r.

Table 12: Period of pest infestation and common pest management strategies

Months after storage	Freq.	%
1-4	53	44.2
5-8	40	33.3
After 8	12	10
No pest incidence	15	12.5
Total	**120**	**100**
Methods of crop protection	**Freq.**	**%**
Only drying	48	40
Botanicals (neem, mahogany etc)	2	1.7
Photoxin tablet	16	13.3
Insecticidal dust	52	43.3
No measure taken	1	0.8
use of ash	1	0.8
Total	**120**	**100**

Farmers expressed their willingness to adopt both the poly-tank storage method and the biocontrol storage method. Those who indicated they will agree to adopt the poly-tank method were about 45% whiles those who strongly agreed also scored 45.5%. 55.5% of the farmers indicated they will agree to adopt the biological control method whiles 31.1% said they strongly agree to adopt the biological control method. From all indication the farmers are willing to adopt both the poly-tank and biological control method of maize storage in the Bawku municipality as shown in table 13 below.

Table 13: Willingness to adopt new storage techniques

I will adopt a new poly-tank storage method		
	Frequency	**Percent**
Strongly Disagree	1	0.8
Disagree	1	0.8
Neither agree nor disagree	9	7.5
Agree	54	45
Strongly agree	55	45.8
Total	120	100
I will adopt biocontrol storage method		
Strogly disagree	1	0.8
Disagree	2	1.7
Neither agree nor Disagree	13	10.9
Agree	66	55.5
Strongly agree	37	31.1
Total	119	100

Conclusion and Recommendation

In all, 42% of respondents were female farmers and 58% male farmers. Household structure on average is made up 7±5 individuals, mean age of household heads was 45-47 years compared to their wives 35 to 38 years. Majority of the household heads and their wives had no education and their primary occupation was crop production. Household wealth was largely concentrated on Livestock inventory. Maize is mostly stored in polypropylene sacs (48%) and jute sacs (33%) on raised platform in household stores. Close to 95.8% of respondents indicated that post-harvest losses during storage are critical challenges to production and household food security. The main causes of loss were insect pest (69.2%), rodents (16.2%) grain moulds (6.7%), weight loss (5.7%) and loss of flavor/nutrition (1.7%). Up to 16.7% of farmers store their maize for 1-4months, 64.2% store maize for 5-8months, and 17.5% store up to 12months. Only 1.7% store maize beyond 12 months; confirming that they produce in small quantities for subsistence.

The idea of community storage methods is still not a technology farmers may adopt; due to a myriad of socio-cultural reasons. The results of the baseline study was expected to guide the implementation of the project as well as serve as reference point
for future impact evaluation. Overall, integrated strategies involving clean farm operations, use of appropriate storage technologies and provision of improved storage structures are required to reduce current losses.

Major crops produced include: maize, millet, peanuts, Bambara nuts, soy beans, rice, and cassava. Though some local and synthetic grain protectants were used, post-harvest loses in 1 year of storage were still beyond acceptable limits. However, there was high willingness to adopt new efficient and effective methods like biological control and poly-tank storage methods being introduce to them. The idea of community storage methods was however still not a technology farmers may adopt; due to a myriad of socio cultural reasons. Integrated strategies involving clean farm operations, use of appropriate storage technologies and provision of improved storage structures may have to be adopted to reduce current losses.

It is recommended that integrated strategies involving clean farm operations, use of poly-tank and biological control storage technologies are used by farmers to reduce current postharvest losses in the area.

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