

ROLE OF THE LIBRARY IN DISSEMINATING INFORMATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Oyinkepreye Sawyerr-George¹, Emilian Bribena² & Paleowei Zikena Cletus¹

¹Bayelsa State College of Arts and Science, PMB 168, Elebele, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

²Niger Delta University, Ammasomma, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

oyinkepreyegeorgesawyer@yahoo.com

+234(0)8035409760, +234(0)8134804032, +234(0)8037744020

Abstract

The paper discusses the role of the Library in rural development. It discusses the importance of information to rural people, the concepts of development and rural development, information needs of rural dwellers, challenges faced by rural people in accessing information and the role of the library and librarian in the development of rural communities. The paper is an opinion paper. Historical research design was used for the paper and data was obtained from documentary sources and analysed with content analysis in a narrative form. Findings from literature reviewed showed that the information needs of the rural people were numerous, ranging from health, agriculture and allied occupations, education, housing, employment, transportation, religion, recreation, culture, welfare and family matters. Their challenges of accessing information were due to illiteracy, poverty, lack of information infrastructure, lack of libraries and information centers. The library can fill the information need of the rural people through education, provision of reading and information materials. It concludes by stating that the library plays an important role in rural development, so they should endeavor to stock the rural libraries with materials that will meet the information needs of the rural people. It goes further to recommend that librarians working in the different types of libraries should endeavor to acquire materials such as books and make ideas available through radio broadcast and cassette recordings.

Keywords: Library, Rural development, Librarian, Information needs, Information dissemination

INTRODUCTION

Information is power and an important raw material for development to rural dwellers. The availability of information in the society fosters meaningful social awareness, cohesion and integration for a more productive life. The prosperity, progress and development of any nation depend upon the nation's ability to acquire, produce, access, and use pertinent information. According to Harande, (2009) "access to information and advice is a key resource for local people in maintaining active and independent lives and access to

information is also critical to letting people know their entitlements to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion".

Statement of problem

Information is essential for survival and the development of rural societies and can be used to improve the lifestyles of rural people. The rural dwellers need information to be free from ignorance, misconception, economic stagnation, political instability and the inability to access funds from government agencies. Lack of information,

most times has led to prenatal death, infant mortality, frustration due to their inability to access funds from government agencies. Although studies have been carried out in the past relating to the role of information to rural development, not much has been written on the role of the library in providing information to rural dwellers to fill their information need. Information science in the past has neglected research on basically non literate societies such as those living in the rural areas of Nigeria. In order to improve the situation, this paper is aimed at identifying the information needs of rural people and the problems of disseminating information to them, so that the rural people could be re-integrated into the main stream of the information society and be able to solve their problems with the aid of the library.

Objectives of the study

1. To identify the information needs of rural dwellers in Nigeria.
2. To find out the role of the library in disseminating information to rural dwellers in Nigeria.
3. To find out the challenges faced by the rural dwellers in accessing information in Nigeria; and;
4. To find out the strategies that could be used in improving information by the library to rural dwellers in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY AND METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The paper used the historical research method. Documentary sources from primary sources were used for gathering data. Data from documentary sources were collected from newspapers articles, unpublished theses, reports, books, journals and web documents. The information was assessed using internal and external criticism. Documents were analysed in a

narrative form with the aid of content analysis.

Conceptual Clarifications

Information is the lifeblood of any society and vital to the activities of both the government and private sectors. According to Dike, (2010), who maintained that the position of nations, their power and influence, increasingly depend on their access to and ability to use information. A nation's development is hinged on the progress and productivity of the citizenry. It is therefore mandatory that the citizens of a nation are well informed of their rights, obligations and privileges, so as to maintain peace and settle disputes amicably. Oyegade, (2000) emphasizes that information is the most singular variable that differentiates and determines if a country is in the first, second, third or fourth world. Information is considered a basic condition for economic development, together with capital, labor and raw materials. Nations that have access to information have the most economic, political power and prestige. Ononogbo (2003), states that information reduces uncertainty, while improving the accuracy of decisions. Its absence means policy mistake, educational disputes, slower productivity growth, which affects the quantity, success and effectiveness of public policy. Etim, (2010) opines that the way information is provided and disseminated has preoccupied man since ancient times.

The Nigerian nation is a developing one with its numerous rural communities. It has all the indices of a developing country like poverty, low Gross domestic product, low literacy levels, leadership challenges and poor medical services. Development is hinged on the progress and productivity of the citizenry and this development of

countries globally cannot be achieved without the development of the rural communities. The rural communities make up to 80 percent of the people in developing countries and such people live in the rural areas. These rural people need positive, relevant and prompt attention in their daily activities. Rural areas are daily faced by negative consequences such as exodus of rural dwellers to urban areas, with resulting problems of unemployment, crime, prostitution, child labor, insecurity, money laundering, bribery, poverty, conflicts, proliferation of shanty living areas, spread of diseases, overstretching of the facilities and infrastructures in the urban areas. Alegbeleye and Aina (1985) stated that "the third world countries have now realized that unless the rural areas are well developed, there would be no meaningful development in these countries." They further stated that development can only be effective if rural dwellers have access to relevant and diverse information for their daily activities. Okiy, (2003) also stated that rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient in their developmental process. People in rural areas whether literate or not should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations, to become better informed citizens generally. Similarly, Diso, (1994) opined that "information must be seen as a basic resource for development, if durable structures are to be provided for effective access and utilization, which entails information capturing, coordination, processing and dissemination.

Rural development

The concept rural development refers to the likely development of rural communities and people. It means the capacity of a

country to improve the social welfare of the people through providing social amenities like quality education, portable water, transportation, infrastructure and medical care. According to Obi (2014) it is a sociological concept in which the rural poor represents a reservoir of untapped talent, a target group that should be given the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of development through education, and good health and education. Rural development is linked with a broad based re-organization and mobilization of rural masses to enhance their capacity to effectively cope with the daily changes of life. For rural development to have a noticeable impact on our lives and development, information infrastructure such as good roads, health facilities, schools, information centres and libraries should be put in place for any meaningful development to take place.

Information needs of rural dwellers

Information need is an individual or group's desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need, as posited by Allen (1989). The 'information' and 'need' in 'information need' have an inseparable interconnection, according to Taylor (1962). Harande, (2009) stated that the information needs of rural communities are many and multidimensional, and were in the areas of health, agriculture and allied occupations, education, housing, employment, transportation, religion, recreation, culture, welfare and family matters, legal matters crime and safety, government and its policies. In her view Sawyerr-George, (2012) opined that the information needs of rural dwellers are in the areas of income generation, which include projects, non farm incomes and money-saving initiatives. Others she mentioned were information about community leadership, literacy support, basic economics, which has to do with petty

trading, finance and loans, government loans and rural development. Ugboma (2002) reiterated the information needs of rural oil producing communities were in the areas of gas flaring, health and compensation. Ugboma, (2010) goes further to state that the legal information needs of rural oil producing communities were in the areas of land ownership and rentage, compensation welfare, negotiations and rights, community employment, oil exploration and exploitation and operational rules for the company. Other information needs of oil producing communities she stated are related to the disposition of mineral land rents, the application of the derivation principle to the allocation of federally collected mineral revenues, the appropriate institutional and fiscal responses to the ecological problems of the oil-producing areas, the responsibility of the oil-prospecting companies to the oil producing communities and the appropriate arrangements for securing the integrity and autonomy of the oil producing communities within the present federal structure.

The role of the Library in rural development

Libraries as custodians of human knowledge have the responsibility to preserve information in their current form. According to Kubenje and Aghoghovwia (2008), libraries are more than a storage facility for printed texts, making use of new technologies in the world of information and communication technology (ICT). The library and information professionals should be seen as important tools for the development of rural communities. Development can only be achieved when the rural people are informed, and this can only happen through the establishment of community libraries in the rural communities and the local government headquarters. The librarians in these

libraries could assist in improving the lives of the rural populace through the following:

Through education, the main purpose of the library is to obtain, preserve and make available recorded information to man. According to Ekere, (2009) the library can promote the spread of knowledge through education and culture to all categories of the population. Education is a primary function of books and it is a basis for development. The library can organize adult literacy classes to improve the lives of the people. This can be done by providing reading materials, audio-visual materials, teacher's manuals, teaching aids and teacher instructional materials.

The library can promote the use of indigenous knowledge by stocking its collection with indigenous knowledge materials. According to Nwabueze and Anyira (2010), libraries can promote access to indigenous knowledge by creating an environment which permits face-to-face forums and network formation to discuss and debate on issues that might be of use to members of the communities. For example, libraries can organize talk shows involving traditional rulers, elderly people and professionals to gather and record information on various local vocations from different subject areas ranging from agriculture, ecosystem, medical care, and conflict management processes. The importance of newspapers cannot be overemphasized, Yang and Ishak (2012) emphasizes the importance of preserving newspapers in the library.

Oral medium such as discussion forums, listening and viewing sessions and drama are emphasized by Banjo (1977), while Gneye (2002) opines that information to rural communities can be disseminated through traditional communication, such as

word of mouth, troubadours, journal, radio and television. The language resources of oral tradition, proverbs, axioms, and otherwise saying should be explored to reinforce modern problem solving skills, and they should be cautious about the use of electronic media that is so individualized. One can in closet say things without attention to civility and communal coexistence. Information can be disseminated using the African folklore, in the form of oral tradition, because information carries many communication and peace building traditions. The values, ideas and customs of a people are born in their language.

Through word of mouth, however, the people will readily speak to anyone willing to listen, expressing his discontent with government, oil companies and their beneficiaries (Kperogi, 2007). Tinuade and Fadekemi (2015) also stated that Librarians can use word of mouth in their different communities to disseminate information and serve as a general center of reliable information. Through mobile libraries, libraries provide access to information by teaching children reading skills to the children in the rural areas and the arrangement of adult education classes for adults in the community. The library can also engage in mobile library so as to reach those that cannot access the library directly. In Rivers state, the state library board has organized such by providing libraries on wheels and large boats to meet the information needs of the rural people. According to Kubenje and Aghoghovwia, (2008) there is a justification for libraries to get involved in eradicating illiteracy. The library can do this by providing space, materials and guidance in developing the reading skills of the illiterate people. The library should also be willing to provide non book materials in the form of e-books,

cassettes, films tapes and video recordings with reading kits to meaningfully contribute to community education and development. Libraries according to Kubenje and Aghoghovwia (2008), should offer customizes services of relevant literature, provide bibliographic services, offer selective dissemination of information and current awareness services to the rural people. The library has to provide the public with the full range of services it can offer the people so as to recognize for its importance by the people. The librarians build lasting relationships with the people so that the communities, such as non-governmental organizations, community development workers, social workers, teachers, youth workers, medical teams, child guidance workers, trade unions, civil society workers and community lawyers they are serving will be able to trust their source of information.

Local media such as radio and television especially radio which is affordable due to its low-cost can be used as strategies of dissemination information in conflict management. According to Tinuade and Fadekemi, (2015) these media are known to have a large coverage of audience which should be exploited by libraries in reaching the populace. Radio remains the most powerful, and cheapest, mass medium for reaching large numbers of people in isolated areas, and with the revolution of the transistor, even the remotest villages have access to radio programmes to solve their problems. The library can also work with community agencies and professionals to develop programmes that will promote good health principles. According to Kubenje and Aghoghovwia (2008), the library should serve as an institution to display posters, advertisement, community radio and media publications that will be

useful to the people to meet their health information needs.

Challenges faced by rural people in accessing information

Rural people have faced different challenges in accessing information such as illiteracy, poverty, lack of information infrastructure, lack of libraries and information centres. Others include lack of teachers, internet facilities and books in schools for teachers to access information, introduction of propaganda and many programmes that are not fully relevant to the development of rural communities were also considered as part of the challenges. The information received by the rural dwellers is either not reliable or distorted in the process of transmission. This unhealthy situation keeps the rural communities in Nigeria and other developing countries far away from development indicators.

FINDINGS

Findings from the literature review shows that their information needs were in the areas of health, agriculture and allied occupations, education, housing, employment, transportation, religion, recreation, culture, welfare and family matters, legal matters crime and safety, government and its policies.

Findings also shows that challenges faced by the rural dwellers in accessing information in Nigeria includes illiteracy, poverty, lack of information infrastructure, lack of libraries and information centres. Others include lack of teachers, internet facilities and books in schools for teachers to access information.

Finally, findings revealed that the library can fill the information needs of rural people through education, provision of reading and information materials, oral

medium such as discussion forums, listening and viewing sessions and drama, mobile libraries, and local media such as radio and television.

CONCLUSION

AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper concludes by emphasizing that libraries and librarians play important roles in providing relevant information to fill the information needs of the rural dwellers in Nigeria, for rural development. It goes further to recommend that librarians working in the different types of libraries should endeavor to identify the services and information needed by the people, acquire materials such as books and make ideas available through radio broadcast and cassette recordings to meet the information needs of the rural people. The libraries should solicit for external funding and financial support to achieve their goals and market their services to the people, because if their information needs are met, the rural populace will be informed, thus reducing the negative effects of lack of information that will enable them live meaningful lives.

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