Information Dissemination and Access for Political Empowerment of Rural People in the Northern States of Nigeria: the Role of the Information Professional

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Abstract

The paper defines empowerment and state the role access to information on politics can play in empowering rural people in the Northern Stales of Nigeria. Rural people form a significant part of the population of Nigeria and so are entitled to information just as any other Nigerian. Access to information by rural people is enhanced by the channels used to disseminate it. One of the problems that rural people face is that politicians use their ignorance to renege on the promises made during campaigns. If they are in empowered with information, they can make up their minds who to vote for. Two research questions were raised and answered. The research method used for this paper was survey method and two thousand study subjects were used as a sample. 'The study found that most channels used to disseminate information to rural people are verbal. for example, the use of colleagues, friends, radio, village heads, political stalwarts and similar groups. 'These do not provide good channels for disseminating objective information on politics. It was suggested that information workers should pick up this challenge of disseminating information using appropriate channels and ensuring access to information by establishing Community Information Centres in rural areas.

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment refers to boosting of self confidence, banishing of negativity about one's self and many other positive benefits which will result in the development of an individual or a community. An ignorant person is not he who cannot read or write but he who is denied information. Since it is an uncontestable fact that information is a powerful tool for attaining certain heights, it can be suicidal for rural people not to have access to information on political activities. Every human being is a political animal, therefore, there is no gain saying that polities is a way of life and should be beneficial to all irrespective of where a person resides.

In this era of election in Nigeria, all hands should be on deck to provide authentic information to the Nigerian populace to assist them take the decision they can be responsible for. In urban areas where there is high concentration of variety of information resources and information centres, the problem of dissemination and access to information is not as acute as it is in the rural areas.

Every Nigerian is entitled to information which when used properly can bring about empowerment. The rural people are ignorant of the usefulness of certain information sources hence they remain in their low level without

remedy. With the ideas of Press and Diggs-Hobson (2005), Librarians can meet the information needs of individuals and their communities by meeting people where they are, not where they are required to be. Every one's information needs cannot be met if a criterion for who should be served, where and when the service should take place is set. The idea is that information for political empowerment can be provided by information providers in collaboration with various establishments. For example, Librarians or information workers can partner with Non Governmental Agencies (NGOs), political parties and even government departments to provide information that can be beneficial to the community they are serving. Information for political empowerment of rural people could be properly utilized if it is well disseminated and accessed by the right users.

Information for political empowerment

Rural people's political activities are enhanced by their awareness for the need to team up using various political groups who could work hand in hand with the traditional rulers to achieve their goal. Political groups such as Youth Association, Community Development Associations, Elders Forum and Women Associations have far-reaching impact on the political activities that can enhance empowerment of rural people. Hence, political stalwarts have access to the communities through these associations. Women are not left behind in politics; hence women leaders of political parties gain access to their women folks through women associations. The barrier to achieving political empowerment is the misuse of the groups of people above due to miss-information which is caused partly by non-literacy and self centeredness. For rural people to be properly empowered, they need to be educated on correct values and benefits for the entire community instead of personal benefits. Education is a major determinant for any activity; hence rural people need to be enlightened if they will benefit from any political programmes. Also they need to be encouraged to educate their wards who can influence their society by embarking on educative activities and being sources of information that can improve the well-being of their parents/guardians. (Daudu 2010).

Poverty is the cause of self centredness of most rural people. There is need to provide information that will assist them fight poverty instead of selling their rights to politicians who do not fulfill the promises they made. Several programmes had been packaged to reduce poverty. Information on programmes such as Fadama projects, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) need to be made available to rural people. This can be done through providing information on how to secure loans from banks and other agencies which will serve as a means of empowering them. When they are "comfortable," they may not be misused by self centered politicians, hence they would be able to take decision based on their understanding instead of pressure.

Statement of the Problem

The attempt of government to disseminate information to its citizens is mostly effective in the urban areas. This is because most facilities for information dissemination are more effective there than in the rural areas, as a result, the rural people are always left behind. For example, advertisements and information on development activities are always shown on television which is mostly an urban area source of information. Government circulars may just end up at the Local Government Area headquarters. Politicians utilize the backwardness of rural people and make false promises which they don't fulfill. The need to disseminate information to rural people and ensure that they have access to such information is a task that must be done.

Significance of the study

Politics is a way of life hence man can not be separated from it whether he lives in urban or rural area.

In the urban areas, there are several ways through which information is disseminated but in the rural areas such ways/channels are limited. This study will provide ways through which information, especially on politics, can be provided for the political empowerment of rural people.

Research Questions

1. What are the channels used for dissemination of information for political empowerment of rural people in the Northern States of Nigeria?

2. What is the extent of accessibility of information from the different channels used to disseminate information to rural people of Northern states of Nigeria?

Literature Review

When politicians are seeking for the votes of rural people, they will try to win them by promising them improvement in their farming activities, social amenities and infrastructural facilities. In most cases, these promises are short lived. From previous occurrences and experiences, what is important is for politicians to provide a long-term benefit for the rural people through some kind of programmes or training that they will continue to benefit long after the politicians may have left office instead of little gifts that are short lived.

In Francophone Africa, Albrecht (1990) reported the efforts of politicians in stimulating socio-economic activities of rural people. They see the rural areas as units composed of groups with diverse, even conflicting interests and power struggles. This realization made them to work on the rural people so as to turn them into confident, development-oriented partners capable of challenging the local development administration and to force them to abandon their colonial role of passive receivers of instructions. The communities were supposed to articulate their own needs and present them as projects in the national discussion of the development plan. Until the rural people are educated to depart from the mentality of colonial administration that had created lack of confidence in themselves, they cannot take responsibility and act maturely, politically.

In the case of Nigeria, grassroots local government practice is supposed to provide contact with the rural people and create confidence in their minds so that they can have access to and benefit from government policies. Based on the positions of Ola (1983) and Iyaha (1989), rural people can be used by the local government authority to achieve government policies such as provision of drinkable water, public transport system, health centres, feeder roads, schools and public parks and recreation centres. The local governments can also awaken the interest of the citizens to participate in diverse programmes, provided information on such programmes is made available to them. The information worker has a vital role to play by ensuring that such information reaches the rural people. This can be achieved through information dissemination. Using current awareness service, door to door information service and even library service

In getting the rural people involved in the development of an area, the local government should educate them. Education is an empowerment tool, and empowerment leads to development. Muhammed (2008) asserts that education is a tool for national development. The emphasis is that education practices whether formal or informal, conventional or indigenous are vital for sustainable development of a people. The role of information provider in this service can be provision of learning materials, making information on scholarships available, and providing information on schools/institutions that rural children can benefit from.

The Role of Libraries is Disseminating Political Information

Information service delivery in almost all fields of human endeavour has today assumed greater

importance because of the link between the provision of information and the expected impact upon the people. However, it is observed that Nigeria is still far behind time in terms of provision of information services especially to rural people. Indeed the African continent is crawling in the aspect of information provision for rural people. That is why (Aboyade) (1990) referred to Julius Nyerere the former Tanzanian Head of state as having once remarked that while other nations try to reach the moon and perhaps Mars, Africans are still struggling to provide villages with information. Inspite of the advert of mobile satellite telephones and recognition of the importance of information technology (ICT) the rural people in Nigeria generally and specifically the northern states of Nigeria have not benefited well in the area of information provision. Hence the need for libraries to face this challenge.

Libraries should make conscious efforts to affect rural people positively by devising ways of reaching them with useful information one of which is information on political activities. Rural people need to have information on political parties and their activities which can be of advantage to them. Such information that will assist them make up their minds on which party or candidate to support and not being bought by temporary benefits such as salt, clothes, or money.

Libraries should gather information of political parties' manifestoes, make clips of party leader's statements and display them in information centres, play audio/visual programmes of political parties in village squares. So as to enlighten them and allow them to make their choice. This is political empowerment.

Current issues on Information Dissemination and Access

In developed worlds, access to information is made simple through the use of online service without limitation to rural or urban areas. The only limitation is when the user does not have knowledge of how to use online resources. The use of online resources and services provide variety of information which change the lives and status of people. This is particularly true when information service can be disseminated online with the opportunity to interact with information seekers. According to Coffman (2004) in Gbaje (2007), if librarians were ever to successfully move their service to the web it would allow librarians to work with patrons to help them find the information they wanted immediately and not days later. This can be achieved through the use of e-mail.

The desire of information providers while disseminating information is for the target group to have access to it which will result to making an impact in their lives. And with the current development of globalization, rural people can benefit from current information on political activities with the assistance of information providers. The information provider/Librarian should be able to sieve useful information to the rural people and display it. This will go along way to empower them.

Research Method

The study was designed to find out how information workers disseminate information to rural people and whether the rural people in the Northern States of Nigeria have access to information on politics. Therefore, survey method was adopted. Survey method according to Ali (2006) is a type of descriptive research which uses sample data to describe and explain what is existent or non-existent on the present status of a phenomenon being investigated. For this reason, a sample of three states representing the three geopolitical zones in the North and three rural areas from each state out of which 2000 study subjects were selected. Questionnaire was used to gather data on the way information on politics was disseminated to the rural people in the study, and to find out the level of access to the information. In addition, observation was made to confirm the responses gathered in the use of questionnaire. The data collected was analysed using explanatory narratives and frequency tables.

Findings and Discussions

For the success of dissemination of information, channels have to be used. It is the types of channels that will guarantee the access to the needed information by users. This study found out the channels used to disseminate information rural people. The findings are presented and discussed below.

Channels of Information Dissemination

In order to investigate the channels used in disseminating information to rural people for political empowerment, data collected in this respect was tabulated and presented as in table 1 below:

Table 1: Channels used for Information Dissemination

Channels	Used	Not Used
Village head/Traditional Rulers	208 (10.8%)	1,719 (89.2%)
Radio	14 (0.7%)	1913 (99.2%)
Television	14632 (76.8%)	464 (24.1%)
Bill Board	1904 (98.8%)	23 (1.2%)
Government Circulars	1904 (98.8%)	23 (1.2%)
News Papers	1181 (61.3%)	746 (38.7%)
News Letter/ Bulletin	1925 (99.9%)	2 (0.1%)
Memoranda	1925 (99.9%)	2 (0.1%)
Posters	1924 (99.8%)	3 (0.2%)
Library	1924 (99.8%)	3 (0.2%)
Town Criers	1110 (57.7%)	817 (42.4%)
Community Dept. Leaders	1109 (57.6%)	818 (42.4%)
Political Party Leaders	1150 (59.7%)	777 (40.3%)
Extension Workers	858 (44.5%)	1069 (55.5%)
Bank Representatives	1926 (99.9%)	1 (0.1%)
Colleagues	2 (0.1%)	1925 (99.9%)
Friends	2 (0.1%)	1925 (99.9%)
School Teachers	766 (39.8%)	1161 (60.3%)
Cooperative Societies	596 (30.9%)	1331 (69.1%)
Market Squares	575 (29.8%)	1352 (70.2%)

Table 1 presents channels that are used to disseminate information to rural people. It could be seen that the respondents agreed that the channels they used most were colleagues recordings 1925 (99.9%) Radio 1913 (99.29) and Village Head 1719 (89.2%) in that order. This was closely followed by market squares 1352 (70.25), cooperative societies 1331 (69.1%) and school teachers 1161 (60.3). The use of some of these channels by rural people is in line with their characteristics. Rural people are oral in nature, they prefer passing information verbally. Of all the channels highly used, the radio was the only channel that writers like Omenesa (1991) and Sylvia (2005) recommended as one of the most effective channels that convey information for political empowerment. But as much as radio is mostly used in the rural areas, it has the limitation of passing information to an audience whether the audience is attentive or not. Once an audience misses a certain information, it cannot be accessed again.

Some of the channels on the table that can be used to disseminate information were not very effective for disseminating information on

politics. For example, the village head who uses a town crier may not want to identify him self with politics openly. However, political party leaders and the library can conveniently disseminate information on political activities. Libraries are not found in rural areas and yet they are the most effective channels that rural people can access information that can provide political empowerment for them. The library can acquire newspapers, store government circulars, memoranda and other resources that people could use. Based on observation, State Library branches in the north were only found in the Local Government headquarters. In villages where the bulk of the rural people were, libraries and reading rooms were absent. They only depended on verbal information passed to them via the village head. They could not access information from newspapers or other printed sources due to their level of education.

Table 2: Extent of Accessibility to channels used for Information Dissemination

Channel	Regularly	Occationally	Not at all
Village head	1,033 (53.6%)	553 (28.7%).	341 (17.7%)
Radio	770 (40.1%)	672 (34.8%)	485 (25.2%
Television	443 (23.0%)	458 (23.8%)	1026 (53.3%
Bill board	20 (1.0%)	774 (40.2%)	1133 (58.8%)
Government Circulars	243 (12.6%)	770 (40.0%)	914 (47.4%)
News papers	51 (2.6%)	906 (47.0%)	970 (50.3%)
News letter/bulleting	144 (7.4%)	759 (39.4%)	1,024 (53.1%)
Memos	-	563 (29.2%)	1,368 (70.8%)
Posters	-	942 (48.9%)	985 (51.1%)
Library	72 (3.7%)	675 (35.0%)	1180 (61.3%)
Town criers	2 (0.1%)	830 (43.0%)	1,095 (56.8%)
Community development leaders	158 (8.2%)	901 (46.7%)	868 (45.0%)
Political party leaders	325 (17.0%)	1145 (59.9%)	442 (23.1%)
Extension workers	66 (3.4%)	1087 (56.4%)	774 (40.0%)
Bank representatives	243 (12.7%)	914 (47.4%)	770 (40.0%)
Colleagues	470 (24.4%)	1423 (73.8%)	34 (1.8%)
Friends	1032 (53.5%)	800 (41.5%)	95 (4.9%)
School teachers	756 (39.3%)	871 (45.2%)	300 (15.6)
Cooperative societies	361 (18.7%)	1124 (58.4%)	442 (22.9%)
Market squares	829 (43.0%)	1064 (55.3%)	34 (1.8%)

The extent of accessibility to channels of information dissemination was the point of the construct in this section. The table above reveals some very important channels of information dissemination that were accessible to the respondents. First in this ranking was information from village head 1033 (53.6%) closely followed by friends 1032 (53.5%). These channels of information dissemination were seen to be accessible because of their nature. Rural people interact with one another very freely and so could easily relate information that might be of benefit to each other. This implies that most channels of information dissemination accessible to rural people were oral and so there would be no lasting impact of the information to the people.

Therefore, information workers could work in collaboration with these channels in order to bring information on polities close to the door steps of the rural people by providing a permanent structure where information could be brought to the rural populace.

Summary

The study revealed that the commonest channels of information dissemination for rural people were the radio, village head and friends. They lacked understanding of the significance of documented channels of information dissemination such as the library, circulars, posters, bulletins, newspapers and memoranda.

Recommendations

It is hereby recommended that:-

1. State Library Boards could take up the responsibility of ensuring that library services are taken to the rural areas instead of stopping at the Local Government headquarters. They could establish Community Information Centres either at the chief's palace or town hall and ensure that information is taken there often.

2. Information workers who would be working in rural areas could abstract information from print sources and translate same for the consumption of the rural people. By so doing, the rural people can get authentic information, evaluate them themselves and use them instead of relying on what some politicians who will twist information to suite their condition will give them.

3. Information workers can source for information from electronic channels, capture information from radio and television and relate same to the rural people through the use of community based organizations such as youth groups, women leaders and community leaders.

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