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Information dissemination, access and utilization for socio-economic empowerment of rural people in northern states of Nigeria

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Rural people in northern states of Nigeria are those whose main occupation is subsistence farming. They exhibit a relatively higher rate of poverty than their counterparts in the urban areas. Therefore, they need information that can empower them to fight poverty and other social vices. The objective of the study was to identify the types of information required, channels available and used to disseminate information to the rural people. Two research questions were raised and answered, and one null hypothesis was formulated and tested using chi-square. Descriptive research method was used and questionnaire was the instrument used to gather data. The study revealed that the information required by rural people in northern states of Nigeria was information on agriculture, bank loans, poverty alleviation programmes and any other information that can raise their socio-economic status. It further revealed that the channels available and used for the dissemination of the information were not adequate. It was suggested among other things, community information centres (CICs) for rural people be established and that state public libraries should use the CICs to disseminate information through the Local Government Information Units.

Keywords: Information channels, Information dissemination, Rural, Socio-economic

Introduction

Rural people in Nigeria in the context of this research refer to people living in rural areas and have low level of education. They are people whose major occupation is subsistence farming and they are generally characterized by extreme poverty, poor health conditions and ignorance. According to Ibii[1], rural people have few social contacts outside their environment and hence acquiring information to boost their socio-economic status becomes difficult for them.

Socio-economic empowerment refers to enabling an individual to acquire the ability and capacity of performing certain tasks which could lead to his/her development, thereby moving the individual from low to high level of development. The socio-economic empowerment of rural people provides them with the ability to fight poverty and hunger. When rural people are empowered, they are strong willed and are better informed to take decisions and stand by such decisions. Information is a powerful implement for empowerment because according to Daudu[2], it takes away ignorance and enables an individual to be bold and enlightened. Information on socio-economic activities such as agriculture, marketing of farm produce, agricultural loans, scholarships for educational programmes among many others are what this research refers to as information for socio-economic empowerment. The importance of information to the socio-economic empowerment of a nation in general and rural communities in particular requires that appropriate channels of communication suitable for this category of communities be identified and used. Many researchers including Omenesa[3] and USAID[4] identified the radio to be one of the most appropriate channels of information dissemination in rural areas. Another channel according to Uga and Fajinbesi[5] include oral transmission in which the rural people themselves cooperate in information sharing so that there can be improved access and utilization of information.

Based on fifteen years of working experience and field observation of rural dwellers by the researchers the current study, it can be stated that poverty, ignorance and illiteracy are more prevalent in the rural areas of Nigeria generally and much more prevalent in the rural areas of northern states of Nigeria in particular. In order to address these mentioned problems, the government of Nigeria initiated programmes such as 'Operation feed the nation, National poverty eradication programmes, National economic empowerment strategies and

Fadama projects'. These programmes were meant to benefit the rural people and move them to a favourable level of socio-economic status or provide socio-economic empowerment for them. In spite of this, there is poverty is still prevalent in rural areas.

Against this background, the researchers undertook this study to ascertain whether or not the rural dwellers have access to information about the programmes put in place by the Nigerian government. The study also envisages to find out how best information can be disseminated, accessed and utilized by rural dwellers to enhance socio-economic empowerment in rural areas of northern states of Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions were addressed by the study:

What types of information do rural people in the three geopolitical zones of Northern Nigeria require for socio-economic empowerment?

What channels are available and used to disseminate information to the rural people in the three geo-political zones of the Northern Nigeria?

Null Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated and tested:

There is no significant difference in the respondents' perception on the types of information utilized for socio-economic empowerment by rural people in the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

- To Identify the types of information needed by rural people for socio-economic empowerment; and
- To find out the channels that can be used to disseminate information to the rural people.

Literature review

The definition of rural people in most literature such as Onokerhorage[6]. Jibowo[7] is tied to their characteristics, which are related to their activities or occupation and the kind of information they need. Majority of rural people, particularly in developing regions are dependent on primary economic activities such as hunting, fishing, farming and pastoralism for their livelihood. Though these are primary production activities, "there is low income generation from them because they are subsistence"[8]. Agriculture as a major occupation of the rural dwellers in Nigeria is physically demanding and requires some form of support technically, mechanically and economically to enhance production and hence there is need for information on government facilities for development of agricultural activities in the rural areas.

Information needs of rural Nigerians are associated with various models of integrated rural development categorized by Idachaba[9] as practiced in Nigeria. They include information on measures to ensure increased farm productivity and income growth, information on timely provision of fertilizers, seeds, pesticides, and farm equipment and machinery. Information should be provided on the availability of agricultural extension staff and their role as a link between agricultural researchers and the rural farmers. Information on government measures for provision of rural infrastructures such as feeder roads for access to both farm inputs and outputs, agricultural credit facilities and the contribution of the rural Nigerians themselves that would enhance successful implementation of government programmes for rural empowerment is important.

Trading, which forms part of the economic activities of the rural people, includes buying and selling of farm products. Other economic activity includes transportation business which requires access to loans, government subsidies and intervention by non-governmental agencies to acquire vehicles such as tricycles (KekeNapep), motorcycles trucks etc., for farm work.

The purpose of socio-economic activities in every country is to bring about national development which can be viewed as activities aimed at ensuring the progress of people in a society[10]. It can also be conceived as an improvement on the material welfare of people, that is, the effort to improve the economic well being of people in any given society or setting.

Information service delivery should be given serious attention if any socio-economic development is to take place because it is a source of enlightenment for all and sundry. It is required at any stage of development for example; the significance of information service delivery was felt during the ancient civilization when Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt and Mesopotamia disseminated information about government policies, security awareness, agriculture, commercial enterprises and religious matters to their citizens and subjects on horse backs, clay tablets and

papyrus[11]. In recent times, channels such as the radio, television, newspapers, internet and mobile phones are available and should be used in rural areas for information service delivery.

Methodology

Descriptive research method was adopted to investigate the problem of information dissemination, access and utilization for socio-economic empowerment. The population of the study was rural people in the three geo-political zones of the northern states of Nigeria totalling 1,932,454. Cluster sampling technique was used to select three states from the three geo-political zones in the north using each zone as a cluster. The hat-and-draw method of random sampling are used to select the local government areas from which 2000 subjects were chosen for the study.

The samples used were limited to adults who were resident in the rural areas under study. They were mostly farmers by profession with low level of education and were not limited to only one gender though males constituted the higher number of respondents due to the cultural background of the area of study.

A questionnaire titled `Information Resources and Services Provision Questionnaire' (IRSPQ) divided into two sections was used. Section A was to gather bio-data of the respondents. Section B had 85 items on types of information, availability of information channels for dissemination and use of information. The questionnaire had a combination of Yes or No and Likert Scale.

The instrument was validated by Professors of Library Science in the Department of Library and Information Science, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. They vetted the questions and made suggestions.

In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the Split-Half Technique of measuring reliability was used. Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula was used to estimate the reliability coefficient at 0.86.

Data collection

Two research assistants together with the researcher distributed 2000 (two thousand) copies of questionnaire in the three geo-political zones of Northern states of Nigeria. The assistants interpreted the questions to those who were illiterate and who didn't understand English. One thousand nine hundred and twenty five filled in questionnaires were received.

Analysis

The data collected from the 1925 questionnaire returned were collated for analysis using descriptive statistics in form of frequencies and percentages as well as chi-square statistics.

Types of information for socio-economic empowerment

The types of information rural people in the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria use for their socio-economic empowerment were analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequencies and percentages. The summary of the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 is a distribution of the types of information needed to be disseminated to and accessed by rural people for their socio-economic empowerment. The expressed opinion of the respondents in Table 1 indicated that they needed information on the items

Table 1—Types of information needed by the rural people for socio economic activities

Types of information needed	Frequency of information accessed	Percentage %
Fertilizers	470	24.4
Agriculture loan	438	22.7
Methods of farming	442	22.9
Improved seeds	661	34.3
Pest control	670	34.8
Crops in high demand	345	17.9
Marketing of crops	550	28.5
Storage methods	584	30.3
Fadama Projects	369	19.1
Prices of local commodities	431	22.4
Water conservation	18	0.9
Farming	655	34.0
Water treatment	18	0.9
Job vacancies	12	0.6
Food and nutrition	669	34.7
National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	286	14.8
Community development	371	19.2
Scholarship	120	6.2
School admission	328	17.0
Drugs news	130	6.8
Business	405	21.0
Health	379	19.7
Cultural activities	405	21.0
Child Care	629	32.6
National Economic Empowerment Strategies (NEEDS)	258	13.4
State Economic Empowerment Strategies (SEED).	472	29.5

identified as socio-economic activities but not many of them actually accessed information on those activities. The highest economic activity performed in the rural areas, is agriculture[12] but information on agricultural-related activities was not highly accessed by the respondents[13]

The highest accessed information on agriculture related activities where 'pest control' with 670 (34.8%) respondents followed by 'improved seeds' 661 (34.3%) respondents. Information on these activities was mostly disseminated by commercial organizations whose basic concern was to market their products. Information on other agriculture related activities like Fadama project (In Nigeria, the term "Fadama" is a Hausa name for irrigable land—usually low-lying plains under-laid by shallow aquifers found along major river systems), agricultural loan and crops in high demand which were important in providing socio-economic empowerment of rural people was observed to be low. Only 345 (17.9%) respondents said they accessed information on 'crops in high demand' and 369 (19.1%) accessed information on 'Fadama project'. Although up to 438 (22.7%) and 470 (24.4%) accessed information on `Agricultural loan' and 'availability of fertilizer' respectively, the number is not satisfactory. Considering the fact that agriculture is a major occupation of the respondents as observed in this study, it would be expected that programmes targeted at the people's socio-economic empowerment would include provision of information on agriculture. This is solely because agriculture was reported to be the main local employer of labour and one of the sources of income in rural areas in Nigeria.

In spite of this fact, the rural people don't have adequate information on government fertilizer supply, crops in high demand and marketing of farm produce. Information on Fadama Project, irrigation management and methods of farming was not adequately accessed by the rural people as such they could not exploit the opportunities that exists in these areas to improve their economic levels.

Channels of information

The data collected for the purpose of answering research question two which sought to find out the channels of communication available and the level of use to disseminate information to the rural people in the three geopolitical zones of Northern Nigeria were analyzed using of descriptive statistics in form, of frequencies and percentage. The summary of the result is presented in Table 2.

From Table 2, it is seen that the channels highly available were village head/traditional rulers with 100% of the respondents acknowledging the availability of this channel in their community. This is followed by radio (99.2%), colleagues (96.9%) and friends (94.9%). Others were community development leaders (82.5%), market squares (70.2%), cooperative societies (69.1%) and school teachers (60.3%). The least channels available were bank representatives (0.2%), newsletters/bulletins (0.5%), memoranda (0.6%) and library/librarians (0.8%). With the spread of information technology facilities, mobiles phone and the internet are becoming available to and used by rural people.

It is one thing for channels of information to be available and another thing for them to be used to secure information for socio-economic empowerment. The village head was still basically the highest channel used to disseminate information to rural people (89.2%) followed by colleagues (84.4%), friends (81.8%), radio (80.3%) and market squares (65.0%). Mobile phones and internet as channels of information dissemination did not score high. The

Table 2—Availability and utilization of channels of information dissemination

Channels of information dissemination	Available	%	Utilization	%
Village Head/Traditional Rulers	1925	100	1719	89.2
Radio (Town criers)	1,913	99.2	1545	80.3
Television	464	24.1	251	13.0
Bill Board	23	1.2	3	0.2
Government Circulars	70	3.6	23	1.2
Newspapers	36	1.9	12	0.6
News Letter / Bulletin	10	0.5	3	0.2
Memoranda	12	0.6	4	0.21
Posters	38	1.9	30	1.6
Library/Librarians	15	0.8	3	0.2
Places of worship	817	423	817	42.3
Community Department Leaders	1590	82.5	818	42.4
Political Party Leaders	777	40.3	650	33.8
Extension Worker	1,069	55.5	858	44.5
Bank Representatives	3	0.2	1	0.1
Colleagues	1865	96.9	1625	84.4
Friends	1826	94.9	1525	81.8
School Teachers	1,161	60.3	766	39.8
Cooperative Societies	1,331	69.1	596	30.9
Market Squares	1,352	70.2	1252	65.0
Mobile Phones	956	49.7	575	29.8
Internet	36	1.9	3	0.2

respondents' level of education did not allow them have the knowledge of using internet and mobile phones adequately. Only (0.2%) and (29.8%) respectively was recorded in the study.

As indicated above, the high rate of use recorded in some channels of information dissemination in this study can be attributed to characteristics of rural dwellers of being heavily dependent on verbal communication and also because of low educational background. Of all the channels of communication available and used at high levels, the radio was the only source that some researchers recommended as the most effective channel that conveys information for socio-economic development to rural dwellers. Radio programmes enabled members of rural communities to gain access to some required information. However, other sources of information that are not being used could be of explored for disseminating information for their socio-economic empowerment.

It is observed that the rural areas did not use channels of information such as libraries and newspapers to access information for their socio-economic empowerment. This is because state library branches were only found in the Local Government Headquarters. In the villages where the bulk of the rural people live, libraries and reading rooms were absent and where reading rooms were available, there were no reading materials such as newspapers, Government circulars and memoranda. The villagers only depended on verbal information passed to them orally via the village head.

Null Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the respondents' perception on the types of information accessed for socio-economic empowerment by rural people in the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria.

To test this hypothesis, chi-square (Ç2) statistic was used and the analysis is presented in Table 3

Table 3 reveals that the chi-square calculated is 1.47, chi-square critical is 5.99, df is 2 and p value is 0.19. Since the chi-square calculated value is less than the chi-square critical value, it shows that there is no significant difference in the respondents' perception on the types of information accessed for socio-economic empowerment in the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria. Also the p value of 0.19 is higher than p 0.05 which confirms that there is no significant difference in the respondents perception therefore the null hypothesis is retained. This further confirms the fact that rural people in the north require similar types of information for socio-economic empowerment. It implies therefore that rural people in the three geo-political zones of Northern states of Nigeria access the same types of information for their socio-economic empowerment.

Recommendations

- The following recommendations are made for successful information dissemination to rural people in the three geo-political zones of Northern Nigeria.
- Information for socio-economic empowerment is mostly disseminated through public media and, sometimes through government controlled channels. Information providers with the assistance of public libraries should exploit the possibilities of processing, repackaging and disseminating such information using extension workers, social and religious places. They could emulate NGOs and profit-making enterprises such as GSM providers, and marketing companies who disseminate information to their target audience. This could be achieved through establishment of community information centres in each village.
- The library is an all encompassing information media centre that stores all the information resources that can be available to a society. The state Library Boards should take up the responsibility of ensuring that. state library services collaborate with community information centres and provide relevant information to the rural people. They can do this through ensuring that the Local Government Information Unit employs professionals to handle that unit. Part of the information for

Table 3—Chi-square analysis of difference in the perception of respondents on the types of information accessed for socio-economic empowerment

Variables	N	df	Chi-square critical	Chi-square calculated	P. value	Remarks
Agriculture related information	4025					
Poverty eradication pogrammes information	2592	2	5.99	1.47	0.19	Not Significant
Social service information	3287					

socio-economic empowerment could come from the Local Government Information Unit to the rural community Information Centre (CIC).

- Most people in rural areas covered could not read nor access information in libraries and other places. Also the radio as a medium of information dissemination had some limitations, one of which was that no assurance existed that the information passed was being received by the target audience at the time of disseminating such information. To address these issues, the community information centre could bridge that gap by collecting the information on behalf of the people and relating it at a more convenient time.
- The use of the community information centre could provide adequate and satisfactory information to rural communities. It can be situated either in the rural reading room of the society (where there is one) or, the chief's palace hall or the community hall (town hall). It should be equipped with audio-visual materials that can easily be operated in the village. Those socio-economic programmes could be shown to the rural people at regular intervals. The first activity of the CIC consists of the process of collecting, processing and storing information by the information specialist.
- The relevant information would be repackaged in various formats and stored in the information system. Dissemination of information could be done using different channels depending on type of information. Information on education for instance could be disseminated through school teachers, family heads and youth groups while information on agriculture could be disseminated through extension workers, farmers' association leaders and Motor Driver's Union. This system will enable appropriate information to reach its correct destination and make the information useful.
- In view of the fact that government programmes that are aimed at reducing poverty in rural areas do not really reach the rural people due to inadequate information, the CIC could work hand in hand with cooperative societies to ensure that information on such programmes, like Fadama project, NAPED, Agric loans and related benefits, are translated to the local language and made available to the rural people. With the assistance of places of worship, the Community Information Centre should endeavour to motivate the rural people to improve themselves through watching film shows on some activities that could create awareness to them. The assistance the worship places can render is through the passing of announcements across to worshippers in their various places of worship.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it could be concluded that rural people in Northern Nigeria use identical types of information. This is because; they have basically the same types of socio-economic activities. For example, farming remains the major economic activity of rural people in the North however, access to information on government supplied fertilizer, sources of agricultural loan, improved crop varieties etc., are very inadequate.

The rural people in the Northern Nigeria do not have access to much needed information that promotes socio-economic activities. This is because government activities and programmes that were designed for rural people are not sufficiently publicized in ways that would benefit rural people.

The shortage of desired information for socio-economic development cuts across the three geo-political zones covered. Perhaps this is responsible for a relatively higher rate of poverty in the region. On the channels used to disseminate information to the rural people, the study concluded that satisfactory channels were not used. However, channels such as professional information workers, extension workers, newspapers, Government circulars, posters, newsletters/bulletins, memoranda mobile phones and internet were not highly used to disseminate information. The use of such channels is likely to produce better outcomes in terms of specific and generalized enlightenment.

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