



**THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN MEETING THE INFORMATION NEEDS
OF THE ILLITERATE RURAL DWELLERS IN FOSTERING NATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the role of public library in meeting the information needs of illiterate adult rural dwellers in fostering national development. Information is a vital tool for national development. It helps the individual to become capable and productive in their social, economy and political obligations that are recipes of nation's development. The concept of illiterate rural adults is explained as citizens whose settlement area is less than the population of five thousand and lacks the basic amenities and social infrastructures. The concept of national development was explained in areas of human endeavour that leads to every citizen contributing his/her knowledge to nation's development. If the ordinary man in the society had to contribute to nation's development, he must be abreast of the information that will broaden his knowledge of areas of operation. The chief source of this information distributor is the public library. The role of public library to illiterate adult rural dwellers was spelt out. The paper also pointed out the possible challenges of public libraries in meeting the information needs of illiterate rural adults and possible solutions to these challenges for effective public library services.

Key Words: Illiterate adults, rural dwellers, National development, Public libraries and Information needs

Introduction

Information is synonymous with knowledge which is essentially required for any measure of success and development in any society. Information is a vital tool for the development of the society (Onohwakpor, 2012). There is an axiom that "information is power". Therefore, information is synonymous with power, as it provides knowledge that equips the individual to contribute to the development of a nation. The illiterate adult rural dwellers have one or more contributions to make to the development of the nation. The question that comes to mind is, do these illiterates adults have access to information that provide

knowledge to meet their information needs that will develop them to contribute their quota to national development?

The development of all sectors of a nation, must take into consideration the level of awareness and knowledge of all her citizens. No matter the level of the people in any nation, there is one contribution or the other that can be made to the development of his nation. In Nigeria, the rate of illiteracy is still on the high side. Recent study shows that about 75% of rural dwellers are still illiterate in reading and writing (2005 National population commission). Despite their illiteracy level, they can still contribute to nation's development, if they have access to relevant information needed to improve on their human endeavours.

Rural areas in Nigeria are settlement areas with the population of less than five thousand and lack the following basic amenities and social infrastructures. These include good drinking water, good access road, electricity, modern health amenities, schools, market and other infrastructures find in urban areas of the country. The US Fact Sheet (2010) defines rural places as those with population of less than 2500 outside of urbanized areas. The adult rural dwellers, refers to adults of drinking age and have the voting right in Nigeria which are above 18 years (Adimorah, 1991).

The illiterate rural adults require life coping information that will assist them to better their social economic and political life. In the pre-colonial days and even up till now, the rural dwellers have constituted themselves into agents of change in one way or the other (Adimorah, 1999). They need information to actualize these changes. Ogunrombi and Amadasu (2009) stated that the rural dwellers constitute 70% of the Nigeria population. They further stated that they are the backbone of Nigeria agricultural economy. Aboyade (1990) noted that the most adult population in rural areas in Nigeria are illiterates that did not receive any form of education who lived in the villages and they are engaged in peasant farming, petty trading and other economic activities. In view of this they need information for improvement to boost the economy of the nation.

Presently the slogan in Nigeria is "Nigeria beyond oil" there is now a shift to these peasants farmers to mechanised their farming. This was emphasised by the Ministry of Agriculture (The Guardian Daily News October 2013). This can materialise when the populace are illiterate. There is the urgent look into identified information needs of this group of citizens for them to feel the sense of belonging to the development of the nation. A country's potential for economic growth is greatly influenced by its endowments in terms of physical and human resources. Despite the abundant physical and human resource endowments, the economic growth rate has been slow It is still between 0.1% (Ogunleye-Adetona, 2010). This is as a result of lack of high level of functional literacy among the populace.

The Concept of Development

Development is seen as a gradual growth toward advancement and power. (Ode and Abe 2012) Development involves the interaction of people at all level. Ogunleye (2010) stated that development of any society aims at the following:

1. Increase the available and widen distribution and production of human basic life sustaining goods(food, shelter, health etc)

2. Raise the standard of living through increasing income, creation of more jobs, better education etc and

3. Expand the range of economic political and social choices available to the individual.

The involvement of rural dwellers in the planning and decision making will lead to achievement of the aims of the society. Shamiya (2006) stated that development in its modernization is concerned with the inculcation of wealth- oriented behaviour and values in individuals. It represents a shift from commodity to human approach which aids the population to appreciate and accept new economic growth. Developments reduce the poverty level of the masses and tend to satisfy their basic needs and emphasized on the nature of goods and services to citizens. Viewing development in its sustainability, it can be referred to as a mode of human development in which resources used are aimed to meet human needs which ensures the sustainability of natural systems and environment. These needs can only be met only in the present but also for generations to come when the people have the knowledge of information that is sustainable. Sustainable development entails three major areas, economically, socially and politically.

Economic development is concerned with the inculcation of wealth oriented behaviour and values in individual, It represents a shift from commodity to human approach which aids the population to appreciate and accept the new economic growth (Ode and Abe, 2012). Majority of illiterate rural dwellers are farmers if well equipped with the correct and recent information in their areas of endeavour, it will go a long way to boost the agricultural products of the nation's economy. Social development entails developing programs that meet the needs of the people to have a positive thinking about life and having a positive interaction about the environment. The US Fact Sheet (2010) defined political development as a way that broadens the usual definition beyond states and governance. Politically the citizens should be able to adapt the situational changes of lower level to higher level. This can be effective if the people are well grinded with the current information.

The Role of Public Libraries in Dissemination of Information

The role of public library is to serve the populace. The public library is seen as the "people University" (Onohwakpor, 2010). Its services cut across all facets of human endeavours. The chief function of public library is the provision of information to its populace. Public libraries are information centre that have to decentralize their services for effective services to the general populace. These services include adequate and current information resources, well trained rural librarians and facilities that will acquaint their target audience with knowledge for national development. To effectively disseminate information that meets the information needs of the rural illiterate adult dwellers, public libraries must as a matter of urgency transform their libraries in rural settings with well trained and committed staff to provide development information services.

Public library programs should serve as access points for residents in their communities by connecting them with resources, information and opportunities that they are interested. This is in line with Issa (2003) that provision of information relating to the interest of the populace is the major task of public libraries as it is linked to other communication organization to a great extent in respect of their importance to a democratic society just as those that manufacture

the electronic and other mass media. Consenting to this, Ode and Abe (2012) stated that public libraries should concern themselves with the contemporary views and also serve as the society's mind in information. The provision of information to rural dwellers does not require gigantic buildings or computerized public libraries. There is an urgent need to reduce the level of illiteracy in among the populace.

Availability and Accessibility of Information in Public Libraries by Illiterate Adult Rural Dwellers

Information is an essential tool for the individual in the society in achieving national development in all facets of life. Due to the nature of information packaged by information disseminators, which are mostly in printed and digitized form, the information is not be easily accessed by the illiterate adult rural dwellers that need it for improved rural life. The ability to relate with others within and outside one's environment freely and satisfactorily depends on available at one's disposal. The individual has a goal to achieve in the society irrespective of the level of literacy.

In the past, so many change agents try to bring information to rural dwellers. These include, MAMSER, BETTER LIFE FOR RURAL WOMEN, DFRRI, Legal AID Council, Church and Mosque and myriad of other groups (Adimorah, 1991). The percentage of literacy success that these groups achieved cannot be ascertained. This is because these various groups or programmes are geared to achieve a particular agenda of the administration that established such programmes. The society is a growing society; it is not static. The provision of information and its accessibility to rural dwellers should flow to them with consistence information disseminators which public library is one of them.

Fostering National Development through Public Library Services

All areas of life are vital for development which the individual should be concerned with. This rages from Education, Agriculture, Health, family politics, and other vital areas of national development. The illiterate adult rural dwellers need information on education that may be useful to them, which they may pass on to their siblings and will lead them to acquisition of knowledge for development of their habitable environment. The illiterate adult rural dweller must be availed of relevant and current information, which is imperative for his/her contributions to the economic, social and political development of the society. Nonetheless, such information packaged for use, must be accurate, timely, relevant and detailed in scope to meet their information needs (Adebayo, 2012). The success of any national development is to equip its citizens of relevant, accurate and timely information on policy formulation, analysis, execution, evaluation, productivity measurement and good financial management (Mahmud, 2012).

Ehikamenor (2003) describes information needs to imply the extent to which the targeted community utilizes it with, preference to their priorities. It is therefore imperative for public libraries to identify, which sector of the economy that illiterate adult rural dwellers can contribute to national development and develop programs that will meet the information needs of illiterate rural dwellers for effective contribution to national development.

Information Needs of the Illiterate Adult Rural Dwellers

Adimorah (1991) identifies the information needs of the illiterate adult rural dwellers to include, where and how they can obtain farm inputs. If the illiterate adult rural dwellers have access to the improved farm inputs, they will produce high quantity of farm products. They also need information on rural community meetings where they will be able to err their views on issue affecting them. The illiterate rural adult dwellers also need information on medical care. There is the saying, "that health is wealth". They need modern medical care for good health. They also need information on lawyers to settle land disputes. Other information needs include, film shows, books in cassette in native languages, where to sell farm products and goods, where to purchase consumer goods at cheaper rate, information on family planning, how to get along with their children, how to use their spare time, tax information and oral history materials.

Oyovu-Tinuoye, Adogbeji, Enekebe and Okonoko (2011) also identified information needs of the rural dwellers to include, political groups, how to market their farm products and how to find their way to the city. In the same vein, Onohwakpor (2012) also identifies the information needs of the rural dwellers to include current policies on agricultural products, obtain loan for farming, free Education for their children and how to get good jobs for their children and acquisition of skills for their siblings for self sustenance.

Public Library Services to Illiterate Adult Rural Dwellers

Nigerian public libraries should see themselves as part of the crusade of bringing about social change that will impinge the living standard of the people. They should act as facilitators for the economic development of these illiterate adult dwellers. Public libraries should break the myth of Seymour and Layne (1979)

That how can library services be made available to people who do not have the motivational characteristics of conventional users. How do they reach people who not think of their community library at all, view it as an alien and a fearful world which may perhaps, accessible to their children in school but certainly not them.

The 21st century public libraries should break this myth and forge ahead to provide resources and services to meet the information needs of illiterate adult rural dwellers. The services of public libraries should go beyond the walls of the libraries not only in digitized was laid down to us through our colonial masters were not relevance to the rural dwellers where majority of them are illiterate in reading and writing western languages. It is establish fact that public libraries are potential means of distribution of wealth information to the populace; the illiterate rural dwellers should not be left in this distribution.

Communication Channel

Most services and resources of public libraries are elitist and not aimed at the rural communities. Since the rural dwellers are mostly illiterates, public libraries should design strategies of communication with them. Public libraries should have a sound knowledge of the demographic situation in their areas of operation. Aboyade (1984) carried out a study on

providing information services in rural setting, and found out that the role of public libraries goes beyond the provision of reading and writing materials. Continuing further, the paper stressed that public libraries hold great potentials to serve illiterate community members who do not have other means of getting information other than the public libraries. This gives cue to the mode of communication of information to illiterate rural adults.

Communication is a strong tool for effective service dissemination of information to illiterate adult rural dwellers in meeting their information needs. The essence of communication in a rural setting is aimed at getting the required information to the target audience (Adimorah, 1991). Information is the capacity to increase knowledge. For such a communication to be effective, the communicator must:

- have ideas useful to the target audience
- make the meaning of this message clear
- ensure that the information communicated is accepted by the receivers
- to motivate the receivers to adopt and practice what the information is communicating.

Communication in this area must be seen as the process by which two or more people exchange ideas, facts, feelings or impressions in ways each gain a common understanding of the meaning, intent and use of the messages. For this communication to be effective, the adult illiterate rural dweller must understand your information. These can be achieved through the following:

- the rural dweller communication skills
- his knowledge
- his information resources
- his attitudes
- his social situation

There must be clear understanding of the above before it can be ascertained that communication had taken place.

The mode of communication can take the form of dramatization, posters and hand bills that can easily be interpreted by the people. This will help the rural populace to articulate their needs and help to connect them with services that are necessary for development. When the individual is development, the nation is also developed.

Benefits of Meeting the Information Needs of the Illiterate Adult Rural Dwellers

The importance of developing the illiterate rural dwellers cannot be overemphasized. It is essential ingredient in any integrated rural development system. Effective communication of information needs of the illiterate rural dwellers will empower them to make their efforts actionable. Effective communication also helps to accelerate the process of change. There is no doubt, that effective dissemination of information that meet the information needs of the illiterate rural dwellers, will lead to improvement in Agricultural products that will boost food production in the nation thereby contributing to the Agricultural development of the nation which in turn boost the economy.

Another benefit that effective information communication will accrue the rural illiterate adult dwellers is that they will be able to guide their wards, on acquisition of trade skills that will occupy the youths gainfully to them and the society. It will also lead to publicizing of public library services to the society and given more recognition than before.

Challenges of Public Libraries in Providing Services to Illiterate Rural Adult Dwellers

For successful implementation of information services to illiterate adult rural dwellers, there are challenges that must be tackled. Oyovwe-Tinuoye *et al.* (2011) stated that Africa public libraries receive much criticism in the literature. With the present services, public libraries in Nigeria had only recorded little success. It must be emphasized that effective rural communication requires time, money and adequate care. It will require staff that will be trained in the local language for successful implementation of this service. This calls for adequate budgeting and planning. Osumah (2004) noted that libraries in rural areas seriously lack funds with which to carry out its tasking jobs of acquisition, selection, processing, storage and dissemination of much needed information by the illiterate adult rural dwellers. Dent and Yannotha (2005) stated inadequate opportunities for training of staff deficiencies in determining specific needs through analysis lack co-operation among agencies involved in library related work and the absence of sustained efforts to achieve an alternative framework as failures of public library system in Africa.

The provision of library services to illiterate adult rural dwellers is beyond just reading and writing which are the conventional services of public libraries. Ode and Abe (2012) were of the opinion that the idea is to create a completely new breed of librarians with a sense of purpose that will have to take a cue from the business world and learn to play the sales man that goes out to the streets to demonstrate to potential customers the quality of his products and usefulness and the need to patronize them. The African section of International federation of Library Association is having this grim of meeting the information needs of illiterate in recent time. This is why there is a call for posters dramatizing information in the 2014 IFLA Conference.

Conclusion

Public libraries are established to serve both the urban, rural, illiterates, and literates in all areas of endeavors. The illiterate adult rural dweller is a citizen of the country that has one potential or the other to contribute to the national development. Their information needs should be provided by the required information provider which is the public library. The impacts of public libraries should be by illiterate adult rural dwellers and not just the elites. This will pave way to functional literacy in the rural areas and will foster national development. This era of insecurity in Nigeria, there is urgent need for rural populace to be abreast of current information about the effect of insecurity to the development of the nation

Recommendations

There is an urgent need for Nigerian public libraries to wake up to its responsibilities in providing information to the rural populace if they are to contribute to the nation's development. More recognition should be give to the public libraries as disseminator of information to the rural areas.

There is need for a bottom up communication from illiterate adult rural dwellers to the operators of the system as a good feedback that must be built into public library services.

Public libraries should extend their tentacles from the urban and semi urban areas to the rural areas in Nigeria. This will reduce the illiteracy rate of adults in rural areas in Nigeria.



There should be training and retraining of staff of public libraries .Public library programs should serve as an access points for residents in their communities by connecting them with resources, information and opportunities in which they are interested. The right resources should be acquired. A cultural liaison officer can be cooperated for effective relationship with the library staff and the designated audience. This also calls for restructuring of the Library school curriculum.

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