



**LEVEL OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION BY
WOMEN IN EDE OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the levels of access to information for democratic participation by women in Ede, Osun State; identifying the level of access to information; sources, their political information needs and the challenges hindering access to information. The descriptive research of the survey method was adopted. From the population of 78,792 of both local government in Ede, Taro Yamane Sampling formula was used to determine the sample size (308) and random sampling technique was used to reach the respondents. Self-designed questionnaire was used for data collection and analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The study found that the level of access of women respondents to information was moderate (43%); political programmes on radio (95%); group discussion on democratic issues (87%) and political campaigns and rallies (77%) were the major sources of information; political information needs of respondents include implementation of community development programmes (90%); investigation and persecution of corrupt officers by anti-corruption agencies (87%) and provision of empowerment programmes (86%). The challenges hindering access to information are inadequate enlightenment (73%) and absence of well-equipped public libraries (63%). The study concluded that the respondents level is access to information is moderate with the most preferred source of information being the Radio, even though that their accessed information does not contribute positively to their democratic participation, probably because the information is inadequate. The study therefore recommended establishment of well- equipped public libraries; establishment of more radio and television stations in rural communities and more enlightenment on political issues.

Keywords: Information Access; Democratic Participation; Utilization; Participation; Women; Ede; Nigeria.



Introduction

Democracy thrives on the principle that power belongs to the people. The people exercise power through their elected representatives, whose mandates must be subjected to periodic renewals on terms dictated by the laws of the land in conformity with conventional democratic principles and practices. In this context, the Nigerian reform process has been seen as an opportunity to strengthen mass involvement and participation in the democratic process by removing existing barriers in such a way that it leads to vast improvement in registration and voting practices: essentially to guarantee the voting right of all Nigerians and ensure that the peoples vote count. The inability to conduct credible elections in the country has been attributed to the long period of military rules, coupled with weak democratic institutions and process and host of other historical factors which have led to the emergence of a political culture characterized by electoral violence, monetized politics, low political accountability, abuse and personalization of power, general apathy towards election and low participation of critical segment of the society, especially women (Agbalajobi, 2010).

The development of any political system depends largely on the awareness and political involvement of the citizens in civic political matters. The citizen needed again to have and build faith in electoral process so much as to participate actively because political education is fundamental to political and democratic participation, there is a dire need to create and sustain efficient access to information. The low participation of women in Democracy in Nigeria has crippled political development in the Nation. The absence or under-representation of women in the very process of decision making and implementation undermines the fundamental concept of a democratic form of governance which assumes that participation and representation in all areas and public life will be equally available to women and men (Akinola, 2012).

Abelson et al (2003) in Gudowsky and Bechtold (2013) identified the following aspects of information as principles to be considered when evaluating and planning public participation processes: accessibility, readability, digestibility, selection and presentation, which chooses the information/experts, and the adequacy of the time available to consider, discuss and challenge the information. Organizing the transfer of expertise in such a way that all participants have access to the same basic information is the true challenge, and the time and resources invested in preparing adequate information sources and supporting the capacity of participants to understand and use this information are crucial. Among the factors affecting women participation in politics Nigeria are gender discrimination ideology, pre-determined social roles assigned to women, male dominance and control, conflicting demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic and social responsibilities and women lack of confidence to vote and run elections. Among others are women perceptions of politics as a dirty game, illiteracy and limited access to information and soon (Falade, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

Series of studies in the area of access to information and democratic participation by women have been done by different researchers (Sharma & Fatima, 2004; Zijp, 1994; Correa, 1995). Observations also have shown that some of the major problems confronting women in Nigeria in democratic participation is limited access to information, illiteracy, religious beliefs, and gender inequality. Most democratic participants among women in Nigeria do not know how to source, where to source, and when to source for information, they need for appropriate democratic participation as well as lack of standard public libraries (Islam & Ahmed, 2012).



It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at examining the level of access to information, available sources of information, and political information needs of women in Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. This is because Ede is a town that has a unique characteristic of being home to both rural and urban dwellers; thereby a mix of the literate, semi-literate and illiterates.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine the level of access to information on the democratic participation by Women in Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the levels of access to information of women in Ede, Osun State;
- ii. ascertain the sources of information available to these women;
- iii. identify the political needs of women in this local government; and
- iv. identify the challenges hindering access to information.

Research Questions

The study sought answers the following questions:

- i. What are the levels of awareness of sources of information in Ede, Osun State, Nigeria?
- ii. What are the sources of information available to women for democratic participation in Ede?
- iii. What are the political needs of these women?
- iv. What are the challenges hindering to access to information?

Review of Related Literature

Information is regarded as the fuel that oils the societal wheels. It encompasses all published and unpublished knowledge about any given subject. Information is the resource which allows us to change and improve the society we live in. A right to access to information held within government institutions usually justified as an instrument for promoting political participation. It has been argued that access is necessary for the realization of the basic right to freedom of opinion and expression that are guaranteed in the United Nation Declaration on Human Rights, subsequent human right declarations and many National constitutions. A related but stronger argument is that access is essential for persons to realize their basic right to participate in the governing of their country and have under a system built on informed consent of the citizenry (Roberts, 2002).

Societal needs are satisfied through various kinds of activities, each of which requires information as an input. These include, for example, education, policy formulation, research and development, personal needs, business, decision-making, mass communications, public goods and private goods. Societal needs are also satisfied at different levels, from individuals through to global communities with information. That is why Panos (1998) quoted in Sharma and Fatima (2004) stated that “access to information is an essential condition for development”. Thus, information if well uttered and packaged for rural communities will exterminate poverty, ignorance and gives enlightenment on how to achieve economic, social, educational, political and cultural objectives towards the development of the entire society.

Access to information in rural communities of Africa is affected by a number of drawbacks, evident in ways in which rural information services are coordinated. It is agreed that information providers and experts need to pay attention to the information needs of the various groups and the communication process



among each group of the user community (Odini, 1995). Researchers such as Mchombu (2003), Aina (2006), Correa, (1997) all established that rural communities in Africa are often left out from participating in government policies, development and other important activities. Why? Because their diverse interest, literacy level, expertise, and their needed information for survival, and development are hidden from the existing information flow. The kind of information delivered to the rural communities is very much system oriented to which most of the rural dwellers cannot understand and benefit from it, and the provision is dependent on the availability, extent of content, Government interest, format and available modes of delivery. This is particularly obvious in developing countries like Africa where infrastructures and development policies are minimally provided due to unplanned development efforts by the governments.

In any state and particularly in states where the policy analysis capabilities of civil societies are poorly developed, political participation rights cannot be exercised effectively without access to government information (Robert, 1999). By making available information about procurement processes and successful bids, access laws make it more difficult for officials to engage in unfair contracting practices. Similarly, access to information aborts decisions regarding the conferral or withholding of other benefits by Government institutions, or regulatory or policing decisions, reduces the probability that such decisions will be taken for improper reasons.

Jaeger and Barnett (2005) defines access as “the present robust system through which information is made available to citizens”. Such system according to them has physical intellectual and social components and those component affect the availability of information, other similar formulation of access to information resources. Democratic participation is to be an active member of society, to actively help in its restructuring and thereby to understand its multiplicity as a chance (Smith, 2011). Falade (2014) defines political participation as the process through which the individual play a role in the political life of his society and has the opportunity to take in deciding what common goals of the society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Arowolo and Aluko (2010) described the essence of political participation in any society, either civilized or premature is to seek control of power, acquisition of power and to influence decision making. Political participation is a means of contributing ones quota to the political system and overall development of the Nation.

According to Hussein and Islam (2012) “women irrespective of location, needed information on family health, food and nutrition, family planning and child education but rural women also need information regarding politics, agricultural and animal husbandry for their involvement in socio-economic growth”. Ukachi (2010) stated that information needs of an individual or group of individuals depends highly on the work activities of such individual or group of individuals e.g. doctors need information on the treatment of sickness while farmers need information on agriculture. Mooko (2005) in Islam and Ahmed (2012) opined that “family situations led women to seek information included health, agriculture, employment, family violence and basic needs for the family”.

Bello (2003) asserted that women participation in politics in Nigeria is categorized from recent developments in Nigerian Politics. It seems to encompass a wide range of actions and strategies that includes voting and voters’ education, candidacy in national and local elections, lending support to candidate who carry gender sensitive agenda, campaigning against those who have policies that are anti-women’s right; and advocating for the integration of women’s right agenda in the platforms of candidate and parties. Strategies women adopt include mechanism and frameworks that enhance women’s participation in politics; such as gender certain percentage, 35% or more of decision making positions for



women, gender mainstreaming strategies that promote a culture of gender sensitivity in government; gender or women's budget that allot a percentage of affirmative action for women's advancement.

According to Eteng, Uwem and Opeke (2015) political information is well established in the literature of political history as any information which is aimed at informing on political matters such as voters registration exercise, petition writing, how to thumbprint, election time and venue of election, sponsoring candidates for election, name of candidates vying for offices, laws governing election malpractices, how to identify party symbols, counting of votes, demonstrations, mass mobilization, ability in the conduct of public affairs and so on. Political information enables one to be able to post queries of specific interests, make contacts with representatives without temporal limits imposed by non-access thereby promoting more involvement.

Methodology

The study adopted a pure quantitative method of the survey design. The projected population for women in Ede North and Ede South is 41,536 (NPC, 2016) from which a sample size of 308 was used. The sample size for this study was determined using Yaro Yamane sampling formula. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Of the 308 copies of questionnaire distributed, 200 copies were returned representing 64.9% return rate. Data analysis was done using descriptive frequency table with the aid of Statistical Percentages for Social Sciences (SPSS).

FINDINGS

Background of the Respondents

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age	21 years-30 years	40	20
	31 years-40 years	49	25
	41 years-50 years	83	42
	51 years-60 years	25	13
	61years and above	3	2
	Total	200	100
Occupation	Job seekers	13	7
	Students	23	12
	Traders/Business women	68	34
	Civil servants	38	19
	Housewives	48	24
	Others	10	5
	Total	200	100



Marital Status	Married	172	86
	Divorced	28	14
	Total	200	100

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. According to age distribution, the table shows that the age bracket of '41 years-50 years'(42%) constitute the majority while distantly followed are those within the age bracket of '31 years-40 years' (25%) while those within the age bracket '61 and above' constitute the minority. Regarding the respondents' occupation, the majority 68(34%) are traders/businesswomen distantly trailed by housewives 48(24%). Job seekers and others constitute the minority. Most of the respondents are married 172(86%) while divorced constitute 14%(28).

Table 2: Respondents' Levels of Access to Political Information

Variable	Frequency	%
High	66	33%
Moderate	85	43%
Low	49	24%
Total	200	100%

Table 2 shows total research output 200 of the surveyed respondents on their level of access to political information. The breakdown from the table indicates that 85(43%) have moderate level of access to political information; 66(33%) have high access to information. 47(25%) have low access to political. This implies that the respondents have moderate access to information.

Table 3: Sources of Information Available to Respondents

Sources of Information	Agreed	%	Disagree	%	Total	%
Political programmes on radio	190	95	10	5	200	100
Political programmes on television	100	50	100	50	200	100
Consultation of libraries for political information	15	7	185	93	200	100
Manifestoes of political party	136	54	64	46	200	100
Group discussion on democratic issues	173	87	27	46	200	100
Newspapers	108	54	92	14	200	100
Magazines	45	22	155	78	200	100
Political journal	34	17	166	83	200	100
Political rallies and campaign	155	77	45	23	200	100
Through Social Media	34	17	166	83	200	100

Table 3 presents the analysis of result on the sources of information that could foster that political participation for women in Ede, Osun State. The table reveals that respondents in their majority 190(95%) agreed that they get information for political participation through radio programmes; 173(87%) agreed to group discussion on democratic issues; 155(77%) agreed to political rallies and campaigns;136(54%) for manifestoes of political parties and 100(50%) represents access to information through political programmes on television. 185(93%) disagreed to public libraries as their source to political information; 166(83%) also disagreed to political journals and social media as their sources to political information. This further reveals that majority of respondents do not use public libraries 185(93%) as their source to political information as well political journals and social media 166(83%).

Table 4: Political Information Needs of Respondents

Information Needs	Agreed	%	Disagreed	%	Total	%
Participation ins Electoral processes	84	42	116	58	200	100
Participation in political rallies and campaigns	55	27	145	73	200	100
Registering as a member of a political party	60	30	140	70	200	100
Implementation of community development programmes	181	90	19	10	200	100



Investigation and persecution of corrupt public office holders by anti-corruption agencies	174	87	26	13	200	100
Provision of empowerment programmes	172	86	28	14	200	100

Table 4 shows that the political needs of respondents. The table reveals that majority of the respondents seek information the implementation of community development programmes 181(90%); Investigation and persecution of corrupt officers by anti-corruption agencies 174(87%); Provision of empowerment programmes 172(86%). Others are participation in electoral processes 84(42%); Participation in rallies and campaigns 52(27%); Registering as a member of a political party 60(30%). Furthermore, Implementation 181(90%) was the most sought political information needs.

Table 5: Challenges Hindering Access to Information by the Respondents

Challenges	Agree	%	Disagree	%	Total	%
Inadequate enlightenment	145	73	55	28	200	100
Low availability of serial information sources.	51	26	149	75	200	100
Absence of well-equipped public libraries	125	63	75	38	200	100
Lack of electricity	21	11	179	90	200	100

Table 5 reveals that majority of the respondents indicated that Inadequate enlightenment 145(73%); Absence of well-equipped public libraries 125(63%) are the main challenges hindering access to political information. Others include low availability of serial information sources 51(26%) and lack of electricity 21(11%).

Discussion of the Findings

This findings confirm with the earlier studies about rural information needs are mainly focused on the day-to-day life of the rural dwellers. Moreover, there is a large body of literature described the political information needs of rural residents in developing countries (Aina, 1991; Mchombu, 2003; Lu, Wang & Xu, 1996). All these studies, however, conclusively stated that rural dwellers do have needs and that they need information for their day-to-day living, such as health, occupation and income generation, self-governance, agriculture, education, religion, recreation and current affairs. At the same time, some information needs have distinct location-specific content.

The analysis of demographic data shows that the age range 41-50 years dominated the population and mostly married women. Their major occupation is trade/business. This is not unexpected as most women in this locality are trade/businesses; some of them are into sales of agricultural products. It was established that respondents their level of access to information was moderate despite some challenges faced. The study further indicates that the respondents have access to needed information through radio programmes that discusses political issues and group discussion on democratic issues. This finding corroborates (Asemah, 2011, Konkwo, 2010; Mooko, 2005) in their investigation that the most accessible and utilized mass media used by women in Nigeria and Africa at large is radio.



It was further revealed that women really need information before participating in politics and their political information needs centre majorly on how government implement community development programmes, investigation and persecution of corrupt public office holders by anti-corruption agencies as well as information on empowerment development programme executed by politicians for the benefit of the people. Momodu (2002) asserted that the Political information needs included the need to know what the various types of governments mean and how they operate, what parliamentary and presidential governments are and how they affect their lives, how to vote, the danger of selling their votes, and the advantages of opposition parties.

Absence of well-equipped public libraries was identified as a major challenge in accessing information for political participation. This is supported by the findings credited to Cheunwatanna (1998), which states that the rural library and information services in Africa are not effective and relevant enough to bridge the information and digital gap. Chijoke (1989), Dawha and Makinta (1993), Okiy (2003) and Aina (2006) further explained that information was emphasized as an important factor in development but libraries were not assigned any role in the process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that women democratic participants' information sources are radio programmes, group discussions on politics, television programmes as well as newspapers, with the most preferred being the Radio, even though that their accessed information does not contribute positively to their democratic participation, probably because the information is inadequate. Based on the conclusion, this study recommends that:

- (a) The state government should establish public libraries and professional staffs should be made available in order to provide quality information services.
- (b) Establishment of more radio, television stations and newspaper houses in rural and sub-urban communities to provide relevant, factual and timely information.
- (c) There is need for regular sensitization of rural dwellers on political issues.
- (d) Public opinion should always be welcomed by politicians and public office holders.
- (e) Women democratic participants should be enlightened on how to use the social media for timely political information.

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