

LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN THE RURAL COMMUNITY IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

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Abstract

In rural communities in Nigeria it is a common belief that lack of basic information facilities has constituted a bottle neck in the ability of such communities to develop and utilise their full potentials and to actively participate in decision making processes of the country. The paper highlights the characteristics of rural communities examine major sources of information to rural people with more attention being paid to current information needs that would improve the rural life and agricultural productivity of the rural people, being the largest segment of the population. Also major constraints to library and information services to rural people are discussed and some solutions proffered.

Introduction

Information is the key to meaningful national development world wide, and the role of information in industry, health, education, agriculture, technology and other sectors required effective control for survival. Both the urban and rural communities require information for sustainable development. This, therefore, means that information is not only important for provision but it should be efficient, prompt and adequate. In this technological age we are in, the progress of any nation depends largely on meeting the information needs of all categories of its people, more especially, that communication is very essential in any

business network.

To accelerate and sustain development, there is the need to improve the information awareness of the rural communities. It is also essential for rural dwellers to be exposed to all kinds of authentic information sources in all spheres of their life, if meaningful development is to be attained in the developing society. Similarly, access to essential information will enhance the capacity of the individual in the rural setting to imbibe new ideas and practices, thereby participating in decision making process.

In Nigeria, the level of information awareness is still very low in the rural areas. This therefore calls for the availability of relevant and up to date information equipment in these areas, to boost the level of information awareness of the rural dwellers and to make them more information conscious, as observed by Nwoke (1993:10). Also, one noticeable thing is, most of the attractive things of life enjoyed by the urban dwellers are virtually absent in the rural areas, such include infrastructural facilities like roads, electricity supply and telecommunication system. Lack of these essentials have made it impossible for the rural dwellers to fully utilize their potentialities.

In another development, Federal Government of Nigeria in its third development plan (1975-80:3-5) stated that true development is the development of man himself. Man is a creative being and the moment his creative potentialities are developed through proper use of relevant information, he becomes participative in decision making process, which is important to the socio-economic transformation of the society in which he lives.

While stressing the importance of information in human life, Issa (1998:132) informed that this is never a subject of controversy that it is a truism that information and ideas as agreed upon by information experts are really basic human needs. It will not be out of place to state that free and equal accessibility to such information and ideas by every member of the society irrespective of racial, religious, geographical and socio-economic status becomes even more fundamental.

Afolabi (1995:8), while expressing the role of libraries in human development informed, that for a developing country like Nigeria with its teeming population illiterates, access to radio, television and daily newspapers and magazines is accurately restricted. Therefore, in his own view, that the provision of libraries as community centres, to educate and inform the people is an important instrument that government can

employ to inform and mobilize mass support for its programmes. In another development Ochogwu (1998:115) observed with deep concern that library and information services in Nigeria has been criticized at different times for being elitist and urban centred at the expenses of the rural majority. He also informed that the rural communities could be said to experience information poverty because the information sources and services are very remote from them (the rural inhabitants).

Characteristics of rural communities in developing nations.

Not until now a rural dweller could be seen as one who lives permanently in the village. When he wakes up in the morning, brushes his teeth with chewing stick occasionally proceeds to the farm, plant and harvest crops and most often disposes some to the market to generate some money for the households. In this respect, his ideas are still very much crude because he has no access to formal education and information. Akintunde (1991:2&3) opined that rural dweller in the past connoted a primitive one who is unadulterated from the evils of the fast urban life. But presently, there is a close link between the rural and urban areas through better communication facilities such as motor roads, postal communication services, the wireless radio and other kinds of social and political mobilization programme of the rural Nigerians and some other developing nations. This is an indication of the fact that there is much awareness of the rural communities in developing nations now than ever before. However, much is still needed as regards to information dissemination.

Some of the characteristics of rural communities are:-

- i) Majorities are strictly agricultural subsistence and others engage in small-scale businesses such as carpentry, weaving, sewing, cattle raring and so on.
- ii) There is low level of literacy.
- iii) There is low level of innovativeness.
- iv) Inadequate health care facilities (even though government, private and voluntary agencies like mission clinics are being established here and there to reach out to the rural areas).