COMMUNITY LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION SERVICE DELIVERY AS PANACEA FOR GRASS ROOTS DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Man cannot exist without information in any society and in any era. It is through information that people understand their roles, privileges, responsibilities and right within the society. This paper reveals that community libraries and information service delivery is critical for grassroots development in Nigeria. It maintains the important of timely information availability and usage in the implementation of any community development cannot be overemphasised. It also reveals that community libraries play critical roles in the realization of the grassroots development in Nigeria. Consequently, references were made using reliable data from literature and evidence-based observations and to relevant websites. Subsequently, this paper explored the information needs assessment of the rural communities as well as the methods of information service delivery for grassroots development in Nigeria. However, several literatures have noted that there are a number of generally recognized problems that hinder the effective information service delivery in rural communities. The paper identified lack of information services in the indigenous languages of the rural communities, lack of provision of basic amenities in the rural communities which transcend to rural dwellers indifference to governance and information service delivery. Based, on the article, some of the recommendations were made, which include: use of indigenous languages for information dissemination in the rural communities in Nigeria, integrating traditional methods of information delivery such as: oral communication, town criers, etc., to bolster community libraries' capacity to deliver information services for grassroots development in Nigeria.

Keywords

Community Libraries, Information Service Delivery, Grassroots Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Information is a vital resource, product and indispensable need for survival in any society and every form of development. Information remains a vital aspect of human existence and without it, societal progress will be seriously impeded. Consequently, libraries as global partners for development are saddled with the responsibility of providing effective information services. They exist to support various societies and cultures in their drive for different stages of development. Meanwhile, although the varied context in which libraries operate inevitably results in difference services they provide and the ways these services are delivered, but libraries normally have characteristics in common. Libraries and librarians are indisputably the primary agents and providers of information materials and services necessary for development. This is notwithstanding the fact that today everyone claims to live in an information age – an era where information can be

easily accessible and utilized. But, the difference between success and failure hinges on the quality, relevance, timeliness and accuracy of the available and utilized information. No wonder it is globally acknowledged that, an uninformed person is basically deformed.

In this wise, effective community information service delivery is the key that unlock sustainable community development and grass roots emancipation. This is because community information is considered as problem-solving hustle which helps the people to take the right decision at the right time. It is further seen as survival information, which means information for everyone in a community for their day to day life (Jaba & Panneerselvam, 2016).Community information enables individuals to make informed decisions relating to themselves, their dependents and their communities, and can promote participation, social inclusion and access to the democratic process (Nwokocha & Chimah, 2016).Community information delivery is a conduit for prosperity, peace, security, and good neighbourliness. It therefore, requires that the necessary tools to provide needed information to rural communities should be given adequate and commensurate consideration. This is because rural communities are often characterized by lack of access to relevant and timely information as well as enough financial strength to acquire resources and facilities to empower themselves.

Rural communities are overtly denied access to information. Consequently, the rural populace suffers from an acute low productivity, social and economic retrogression due to mainly ignorance, resulting from inadequate or total absence of information dissemination (Nwokocha & Chimah, 2016). Lack of access to tailor-made information affects the people's health, education, agriculture, economic wellbeing, security and even good neighbourliness behaviour in the community. The situation keeps on becoming worse and negatively affects their entire productive capacity as a very large percentage of the country's population. In this light, there arise the need to rethink and reassess ways through which the information needs of the rural communities in Nigeria can be met. After all, Attama (2014) puts it that the major problem of development in the third world countries, including Nigeria, is the over concentration of development programmes in the urban areas with little or no attention to the rural communities. Therefore, with the mirage of the problems facing the rural communities in Nigeria, effective information service delivery should be seen as the business of all librarians and information professionals.

Community Libraries and Information Service Delivery: A Conceptual Analysis

Community libraries and information centres are libraries and information centres domiciled in economically disadvantaged communities established to provide information for the members in order to enable the local people participate in programmes aimed at meeting their socio-economic, political, educational and cultural needs (Uzuegbu & Uzuegbu, 2013). Similarly, Uzuegbu and Arua (2018) explain that while a community library offers traditional or conventional public library services to members of the rural community, a community information centre in an ideal situation offers rural-based library and information services such that covers the diverse needs of rural peoples culture, literacy level and occupation, by deploying a social system to identify their needs and communicate appropriate information to the people.

Community libraries are the mechanisms for enhancing the provision of library and information services of special relevance to a particular community, at community level in order to foster their social, domestic, cultural, religious, political, health or educational engagements (Feather &Sturges, 2003).Community libraries facilitates access to information which is critical in letting people know their entitlements and to demand their rights as well as hold governments and

its agencies to account. Rural dwellers should have access to any kind of information whether literate or not because that is the only basis to becoming capable and productive in their social and political obligations. Access to information brings about informed and active citizens in economic, educational and socio-political activities. Therefore, the provision of libraries and information services create channels through which development information is disseminated around the rural communities. Access to relevance and timely information also makes it possible for the rural populace to create meaningful contributions to their environment as well as enhance their ability and right in demanding government presence to their communities (Justice Development and Peace Commission [JDPC], 2012).

Information service delivery is driven by the recognition that the way things are done have not kept pace with the people' expectations or needs. Therefore, transforming the way information service is delivered makes communities' dealings with government easier and quicker (Plibersek, 2011). It offers rural dwellers quality service when and how they need it. It also gives better service in ways that are effective, creating flexible and agile systems. Clearly, the focus of rural information service delivery calls for increased knowledge and information sharing about economic activities, agricultural production (IIboudo & Castello, 2014), healthcare services and other social activities, using appropriate information dissemination channels (Billah, as cited in Anaehobi, 2014). In information service delivery, people, systems and institutions are linked together to promote and enable mutual learning, growth and prosperity through effective and adequate access and use of information.

As a matter of fact, information service delivery involves a whole array of activities and tools. For instance, in Ghana, Malaysia, Singapore and other technologically progressive countries, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), is gradually and steadily becoming the tools for providing libraries and information services to every nook and cranny, including the rural communities in an attempt to bridge the digital and information gap between the rural and the urban folks in the countries (Abissat, as cited in Musa & Attama, 2016).This tools can be adopted in order to make information service delivery easier, faster and wider so as to meet up with the information needs for grassroots development. Equally, information service providers should understand the purpose of community information needs assessment, decide the kind of information to be collected, select appropriate information access tools and provide effective access to the information and encourage use of information (Justice Development and Peace Commission [JDPC], 2012).In fact, in information service delivery, the interest of farmers, artisans, market men and women, children, girls, indigenous people, the aged and the handicaps, should be effective integrated to enhance improved livelihoods (Castello & Braun, 2016).

Moreover, researches have shown that life in the communities is often boring, non-motivational and non-inspiring (Musa & Attama, 2016; Nwokocha & Chimah, 2016).They are majorly illiterates and ignorance people, not particularly because of their making but due to lack of opportunities to get educated, informed, trained, enlightened, or sensitized. There is paucity of information resources and services which can make life easier and worth living. This gag in information services delivery need to be closed through provision of community library and information centres to enable the communities leverage on government programmes for grassroots development.

Conceptual Analysis of Grass Roots Development

Grassroots development can be said to be synonymous to information. In other words, an informed community is a developed community. However, development is a state or condition of progressive evolvement or improvement either in quality and quantity of a phenomenon. It represents a positive change; a process by which livelihoods are improved as communities and individuals are empowered to lead happy, healthy and prosperous lives (Kennedy, 2021). Melkote, as cited in Nwokocha and Chimah (2016) see development as the satisfaction of needs, indigenous self-reliance, and life in harmony with the environment. It equally construed as a multidimensional and multifaceted process that involve changes in the social structures, attitudes, institution, economic-growth, reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty (Servaes, 1996). Applying this definition to the to the rural communities means that rural development cannot be achieved without building the capacities of the rural dwellers whose involvement is critical in any effort to transform their lives and livelihood.

Within the context of this study, grassroots development is considered as defined by the Inter-American Foundations (2021), which is the process by which disadvantaged people organize themselves to improve the social, cultural and economic well-being of their families, communities and societies. It involves community members working together to improve their collective livelihoods. It is bottom-up and locally accountable, acknowledging that the process of development is just as important as the results (Kennedy, 2021). Grassroots development focuses primarily on capacity building; promotes inclusiveness and resilience, as well as provides a space for communities to address local issues, find common ground and balance competing interests. It anchors on the prism that the key to sustainable democracies, equitable societies and prosperous economies is a people-oriented strategy that stresses participation, organizational development and networking (Campos, Barinaga, Kain, Oloko & Zapata, 2019). Grassroots development is a product of effective information service delivery which enhances access and use of information for productive engagements by rural people and communities.

As a matter of note, grassroots development is the core of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which aims at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable (United Nations, 2019).Achieving grassroots development as envisaged in the SDG 11 seems impossible in Nigeria, primarily, because information service delivery to the rural communities and grassroots is glaringly grossly inadequate. This is in addition to the fact that development is measured by progressive improvement in infrastructures and services, improved income of the citizenry, development in assets, resources and valuable practices as well as the provision of housing, water, foods, sanitation, energy, transportation, etc. Indeed, agricultural infrastructure, maternal health clinics, sanitation systems and access to fresh water can all be viewed as objectively beneficial to any community. Grassroots development at various community levels however, ongoing community development requires a very different approach, rather than merely providing infrastructure, healthcare clinics or emergency relief, truly sustainable programmes at the community levels must be a reflection of the community's real needs and values. This is absolutely information reliant because without information there will no grassroots development. In a nutshell, effective information service delivery is paramount in developing and strengthening institutions, mechanisms, and capacities in the communities for grassroots development.

Information Needs Assessment of Rural Communities for Grassroots Development

Community needs assessment is an excellent way of identifying the desires of community people for development. However, in as much as the information desired by rural communities vary, such information needs usually focus on education, health, water and sanitation, agriculture, infrastructure, security and other government activities. Ajibola, as cited in Anaehobi (2014) suggests that the rural community' s information needs are based on the activities that affect their daily life and wellbeing. Thus, in assessing the information needs of rural communities for grassroots development, Harande (2009), Nwokocha and Chimah (2016), identified the information needs assessment of community people as follows:

- *Agriculture and allied occupations:* There is no gainsaying that the most prominent area of information needs of rural communities and the people is agricultural information. This category of information comprises information on planting season, treatment of seeds, fertilizer application, soil conservation, prevention of plants and animal diseases, storage of farm products, marketing of farm produce, cooperative activities and other agricultural-related activities.

- *Health information:* Health is wealth, and the rural people are also aware of this axiom. They somewhat seek information that will enable them live healthy, and long. They need information on prevention of various diseases that affect them, as well as information on the cost of attaining healthcare services.

- *Education:* Observations reveal that majority of illiterate and semi-literate rural people are not enemies to education but only that most of them do not have the opportunity to access information on educational facilities. In fact, their illiteracy and lack of any formal education could be attributed to ignorance, poor parental background, lack of encouragement and lack of information. Therefore, to close this gap, rural people need educational information to enable them know existing schools around them, school fees, examinations, scholarship, and other information related to education.

- *Family and welfare matters:* Family is an important institution that both rural and urban, or educated and uneducated people fall into. Information on family and welfare matters include all aspects of life-saving and life-sustaining issues. Example, having information on the implications of pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex, under-age marriage, marriage, pregnancy, maternal and child health, juvenile delinquency, healthy eating habits, family cleanliness, etc., are essential needs of rural families.

- *Neighbourhood:* Access to information concerning good neighbourliness is a vital need of every community. Ideally, peaceful, safe, and secured neighbourhood is a source of prosperity and progress. Thus, rural communities have needs for various neighbourhood information such as: water supply, electricity supply, environmental sanitation, refuse disposal, road maintenance and drought.

- *Land and housing matters:* People in rural communities also need information on where and how they can meet their land and housing needs. For instance, they need information on the cost of building materials, land-related matters, building permit and community customs with regards to building houses on their land, loans to build houses and the type of materials needed to build their houses.

- *Religious and Cultural matters:* Rural dwellers need information on religious and cultural matters to enable them meet up with their religious and cultural responsibilities. Religious and cultural information helps rural dwellers to know religious rites, cultural practices, food, dressing, marriage rites, burial rites, etc.

- *Security and safety information:* Rural communities need information on how to prevent crimes and security threats, as well as the role of the law enforcement agencies like the police, etc.

- ***Employment and economic information:*** Rural communities need information on employment opportunities, tax regulations, investment opportunities, financial matters, banking system activities, and other economic matters.

- ***Governance and government policies:*** Rural dwellers need information political rights to enable them participate in democratic processes like elections, citizenship rights and obligations such as the right to vote and be voted for.

- ***Legal matters:*** Information on legal matters pertain to laws, constitutions, Acts of government, etc., and how they affect individuals, groups, organizations, and government functions. Thus, rural communities need these categories of information to guide their actions and activities.

- ***Transportation:*** Rural dwellers need information on the cost of bicycles, motorcycles and vehicles and where to obtain them. They also need information about road construction and maintenance. Transportation information is vital in reducing case of accident in the rural communities.

Methods of Information Service Delivery in Community Libraries: Implications for Grassroots Development

Delivering information services to community dwellers are uniquely peculiar because of their knowledge level. Studies show that rural dwellers are mostly illiterate and lack some emerging information dissemination facilities such as information and communication technologies (ICT). They rely greatly on oral and non-written channels of information such as: town criers, palm fronds, traditional drums, etc. However, it is worthy to reiterate that information as an essential tool for human existence need appropriate channels at all times to be delivered in order to meet expectations. More so, information is the lifeblood of any organized society, including the rural communities. It is the moving force of any society, organization or institution. It is a communication symbol transferred between any two points in human communication or machine networks. Meyer, as cited in Musa, Yakubu and Sheriff (2021) assert that information is interdependent with technology. It is almost always part of technology, and of course, the hidden part of technology. Rollings, as cited in Opara (2014) describes it as the soft part of technology. Okogwu and Nnam, as cited in Musa, Yakubu and Sheriff (2021) maintain that information is required by all to address the nagging question of what, how, where, and why which prompt people to search through different information services to satisfy their curiosity and clear ambiguity.

To deliver information means to disseminate or spread information, knowledge or at the primary level, data, so that it reaches many people based on their information needs. Therefore, information regardless of type and form has to be effectively disseminated before it is used in decision making for grassroots development. In this wise, information service to rural communities for grassroots development can be delivered through the following methods:

Use of Oral Media: Oral means of information is the oldest means of information delivery in human history. Many people believe one of the best oral ways of disseminating grassroots development information to rural communities in Nigeria is the use of traditional association and institutions like churches, mosques, village unions, cultural groups, women associations, etc. Oral method of information service delivery is the process of verbally transmitting information or ideas and messages from one individual to another or group of individuals by words of mouth (Ugah, 2014). One of the major advantages of oral means of communication is that it is less formal and more personal than written information.

Public Enlightenment: Community libraries can collaborate with community leaders, donor agencies, and community associations to awareness or enlightenment campaign on issues that affect the development of the rural people. Audio-visual materials, posters and other easy to understand information resources concerning innovations on grass root development can be shown to the public to make them have a vicarious experience of the subject matter. An expert can be brought in to deliver talks on issues such as maternal health, agricultural, prices of farm produce, disease outbreak like the COVID-19, government programmes, educational foundations and scholarship, etc., during such public campaigns.

Information Repackaging: This simply means ways of adopting information to suit the desired information needs of any user or group of users. In information packaging, the librarian rearranges or repackages the contents of information in such a way that it would satisfy the information need of the rural dwellers, given his/her background. Packaging and rearranging of information can be done through many ways such as: language repackaging, content repackaging and medium repackaging, among others.

Language Repackaging: Here, information presented in a language that is alien to the intended receivers, is translated to the language that is understood and accepted to by the intended receivers.

Content Repackaging: This simply means to reassemble the content of information to the taste of a particular user or group of users. Information content can be statistically presented or put in such a way that the appropriate users may find it difficult to use grammatical expression may be added to explain what they mean or what they are.

Medium Repackaging: Appropriate information can be properly used by the right user if the medium or source in which the information is presented is in harmony with the characteristics of the user. For example, if such a user is an illiterate, semi-literate, or physically impaired like deaf or dumb, the information can be delivered via oral or visual aids or film shows, or in indigenous language of the intended information users, or through discussion groups on grass root development can be organised to transmit such information to him. This medium repackaging could equally mean sending information say government policy to the town criers, village meetings, age grade meetings in order to meet the information needs of the rural dwellers (Uhegbu, 2007).

Display and Exhibition: Community libraries can actively leverage on display and exhibition to delivery information services to rural communities for grassroots development. Periodically, small exhibition of newly acquired books on one subject or on a number of related subjects are made available in libraries. The exhibition may also be made outside the library but around its premises. This is what is meant by library display. They can equally be made on pictures, engineering drawings, posters, etc., or on anything that can draw or attract the attention of rural people to the activities of the community libraries for the purpose of grassroots development. Library display is part of current awareness services with the primary aim of creating awareness about newly acquired information resources. Display and exhibition as a tool in delivering information services to rural communities provoke demands and stimulate inquiries that would lead to the full exploitation of library resources and to improve the patronage of the library.

Extension Services: This is usually introduced especially when the library is satisfied that it has at least, met the minimum level of bibliographic services expected of it to its immediate user community. However, in order to effectively deliver information services for grass root development among rural dwellers, community libraries need to practice one of their role of

extension their services to nearby communities. Extension services is typically taking community library services to the door post of the rural people either through their community associations, women associations, age-grade, youth associations, churches, and community schools. This may involve story telling services, dramas, dancing competition, reading and speaking competition, film shows, visits to schools, etc.

Challenges facing Community Libraries in Information Service Delivery for Grassroots Development in Nigeria

These are challenging times for rural communities and institutions for grassroots development such as the community libraries. News abound of global recession which heightened national unsustainable budgetary plans and stringent budget cuts on administrative services, thus having a devastating impact on state and local governments service agencies. With the realities on ground across all sectors, rural information service delivery by community libraries are experiencing a very difficult time, compounded by age-long neglect from governments. However, Nwokocha and Chimah (2016) note that information hunger is prevalent and biting hard on rural communities, and this has resulted in poor living conditions, illiteracy and poverty. This is linked to the infrastructural decay and the digital divide between the urban and rural areas in Africa. Furthermore, the information available to the predominantly illiterate rural populace is often in a language they do not comprehend.

Consequently, Musa and Ogbuji (2014), Nwokocha and Chimah (2016) identify the major challenges facing community libraries in information service delivery for grassroots development in Nigeria to include: lack of political will, poor infrastructure/lack of basic amenities, inadequate funding, inadequate human resources, poor attitude to information providers, high rate of illiteracy, irrelevance information resources, poor communication between linkage partners, and lack of indigenously packaged information.

Inadequate funding: Inadequate fund is a national malady facing public, community, school, academic, and even national libraries. Inadequate funding has affected every aspect of community libraries' services. This is most importantly as nearly all library materials are purchased from outside Nigeria. In fact, due to shortage of foreign currency and high exchange rate, acquisition of materials has drastically dropped and in some cases completely stopped. Due, to inadequate funding, many public and community libraries in Nigerian do not have the capacity to meet their responsibilities in support of grassroots development.

Poor infrastructure/lack of basic amenities: There is a general decay in infrastructural facilities and basic amenities in Nigeria include public and community libraries. This is practically due to lack of/poor maintenance culture in Nigeria. In other words, while contemporary facilities are lacking in most public libraries, the few available ones are not properly maintained. This is a serious impediment on community libraries' ability to deliver information services for grassroots development in Nigeria.

Inadequate human resources: Another major challenge facing community libraries in delivering information services for grassroots development is inadequate professional community librarians with requisite skills in dealing with local norms, and cultural issues that affect satisfying rural dwellers' information needs.

Poor attitude to information providers: Most information providers do not possess friendly attitude that encourageusers of information. This is quite dangerous when displayed to rural illiterate information user group who typically needs all amount of inviting attitude.

High rate of illiteracy: High rate of illiteracy is a strong drawback to community libraries' capacity in information service delivery for grassroots development. This has a profound effect in communicating available information and in passing information whose interpretation may reduce the potency of the expected message.

Lack of indigenously packaged information: Lack of information in the language or form that most indigenous people would be able to access, understand and use is a major problem to community libraries' information service delivery. This is because in Nigeria there are over 250 indigenous languages yet, only about four languages (English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) seem to dominate the medium of information dissemination.

However, despite the enormous challenges, there appears to be prospects for community libraries in developing programmes that are grassroots development centred. In recent years, the growth of the internet and the transition to information and knowledge-based societies people have become more and more conscious of the importance of learning and knowledge as a basis for individual, community, economic and social development some of these community information centres and enjoying the support of NGOs, and civil societies including United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] (Ndinde, as cited in Musa, Yakubu & Sheriff, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Information is to the society what blood is to human beings. Information is indispensable for grassroots development in both urban and rural communities. Thus, to enhance grassroots development by ensuring that rural dwellers contribute positively to their lives, their immediate families, communities and the nation, the resources needed must be made available to them. Rural people need information to function effectively just likes the urban dwellers. They need to have voice to demand for information, knowledge and skills to excel in their occupations. When community information is modelled along the needs of the rural people, real development will take place and effective rural development will take place.

In view of the above submission associated with the information service delivery by community libraries, the following recommendations are made:

- Use of indigenous or local languages for information dissemination in the rural communities in Nigeria,

- Integrating traditional methods of information dissemination such as oral communication, town criers, etc., into the nation mass communication/information delivery system to meet the citizens' information needs.

- Strengthening of the community libraries through adequate funding and political support for enhanced capacity to contribute maximally towards grassroots development.

- Urgent actions in providing adequate infrastructural facilities such as road and electricity supply with particular reference to the rural areas in the country.

- Establishment of community libraries and information centres in every autonomous community in Nigeria in order to cushion the effects of information poverty arising from the

distance between state branches of national libraries and state library boards and the rural dwellers.

- Making States owned radio and television stations to broadcast/telecast in the languages of the areas (dialects) where they operate rather than in foreign languages.

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