

Provision of Information to Rural Communities in Bama Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study surveyed the provision of information services to rural communities in Nguro-Soye district of Bama Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. Objective of the study include assessing information needs profile and the existing information service providers in Soye Community. Simple random sampling method was used to obtain proportional figures of 300 people. The instrument used for data collection was a structured interview schedule designed by the researchers referred to as Rural Community Information Service Survey (RCISS). Three hundred (300) copies of the instrument were administered and 275 copies were returned, representing 91.7%. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages. The findings of the study showed that rural people in the Soye district have identifiable information needs mainly in the areas of agriculture, health, government programmes and small scale industries. They visit the existing information service providers in the community to satisfy these needs. However, majority of them expressed that they are not satisfied with information provided to them by these agencies. Findings further revealed that majority of the respondents are aware of ICT services – such as radio and television broadcast, and GSM, except the internet, in the provision of information dissemination and communication. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that community participation in provision and dissemination of information should be encouraged through regular consultations, meetings and discussions between the community members and information providers.

Introduction

The concept of community information service is a library-based activity aimed at meeting the everyday information needs of the general public. Kempson (1990) described community information service, as services which assist individuals or groups with daily information needs dealing with their homes, jobs and rights. Thus, community information service is anchored on the provision of information services and resources that can be used to improve the well-being of individuals and groups in community. Provision of information to rural communities is particularly crucial at a time when sustainable development efforts are increasingly becoming people-centred. Therefore, provision of relevant and timely information to meet their socio-economic needs will enable them to contribute meaningfully to the development process. However, in Nigeria public libraries are mostly established in urban areas of Nigeria, while majority of the population live in rural areas where there are no public libraries or information centres to access information that would enhance their livelihood. (Nwegbu, Echezona and Okafor, 2012)

Nguro-Soye district is situated in Bama Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. The district was created in 1982. Administratively, Soye district is composed of seven (7) village units, namely: Asbaram, China, Kaliari, Kajeri, Jaudiri, Sabsawa and Soye. A Village Head, known as 'Lawan' heads each village unit. There are one hundred and eighteen (118) wards under the seven (7) village units in the district. Each village unit is headed by a Ward Head known as 'Bulama'. The Kanuri constitutes the dominant ethnic group. Also,

nomadic herdsmen such as Shuwa-Arabs and Fulanis are found in small numbers in the district. Linear settlements are found in the major villages like Soye, Jaudiri and Kajeri while dispersed settlements are commonly found in nucleated villages and hamlets in the district. Estimated figures from the District Head Office show that the district has a total population of about 18,000 people. Islamic laws, customs and culture are pervasive and in most cases have supplanted native laws, customs and beliefs.

Primarily, the land is used for agricultural purposes. During the rainy season the people engage in crop production. The major crops grown are millet, sorghum, beans and groundnuts. During the dry season the fadama fields are used for irrigation, growing vegetables such as onions, carrot, cassava, ginger, pepper, cabbages, etc, for income generation. Livestock husbandry is also practiced in the area. Though agriculture is the major economic activity among the inhabitants of the Soye district, other forms of economic activities of the people include hunting, petty trading and traditional industries such as local crafts which also occupy an important place in the economy of the people. Generally, essential social amenities such as good portable water, electricity, rural roads and transport services, efficient marketing services, storage facilities, medical facilities, schools and leisure facilities are inadequate in the area.

Statement of the Problem

Provision of quality information is an essential resource for people and communities in both rural and urban areas because of its value in improving

the quality of life of the people. Meyer (2005) observed that there is a positive relationship between access to information and development. Thus, provision of information through rural community information services would go a long way in supporting sustainable development programmes in rural areas. However, the fact remains that access to reliable and usable information by the rural people seem to be very low in many parts of Nigeria. They do not access information that would enable them improve their well-being in the communities. Diso (2005) observed that rural inhabitants in present day Nigeria are not reaping from the fruits of the enormous wealth the country has. Information services that will greatly enhance their productivity, transform their community into a lively and enlightened one, and empower their economic base, are not effective and relevant and the services are not fashioned towards the above mentioned objectives. Generally, in our rural areas, there is an acute shortage of information services. This makes the rural communities incapacitated and makes it difficult to associate with other communities to develop and make progress. It is in view of this that the study examined the provision of information services to rural communities in Nguro-Soye district of Bama Local Government Area of Borno State.

Objectives of the Study

This study assessed the following:

1. Information needs profile of the Soye Community
2. Existing information service providers in the Soye Community
3. Awareness and use of information and communication technology services among the Soye Community.

Literature Review

Provision of quality information is an essential resource for rural communities because of its value in improving their living standards. Rural community information service programmes remain the only avenue for providing the right kind of information and at the right time to the people in order to achieve a meaningful life. Community information service is designed to assist individuals and groups solve their daily problems through the use of quality information or by linking them to relevant agencies where they access quality information.

Edem (2002) observed that the need for providing information services to the rural people in Nigeria is an on-going concern. The information environment of this silent majority is yet to record any marked improvement despite several efforts made. The fact remains that the amount of reliable and usable information reaching rural dwellers is almost negligible. The reasons for this are not far-fetched.

Firstly, the provision of information in these areas is not on the priority list of the government programmes. Secondly, most rural development programmes hardly include any information provision components.

Ottong and Edem (2007) reported the result of a study aimed at identifying the library and information services in Calabar South rural communities. The results showed that because of the unavailability of libraries and information services in the rural communities, the respondents depended largely on the oral-based and unconventional sources of information like friends, community leaders, and churches, among others. Similarly, Utor and Utor (2007) studied information needs of rural communities in Vandeikya local government area of Benue state and reported that a number of factors inhibit access to information. These factors include amongst others, high cost of information materials, high rate of illiteracy, absence of information centres and rural public libraries. Also, Obaje (2011) reported that the common sources from which information is largely disseminated in rural areas of Nigeria remain through, social welfare workers, health workers, agricultural extension workers, community leaders, local government staff, teachers, visitors from the city, mass media (radio and in rare cases, television), community meetings, churches and mosques. These sources of information transfer are grossly ineffective and inadequate if the rural areas of Nigeria are to acquire and utilize the kind of information required for development.

Extending ICT infrastructure into rural areas in order to encourage growth, alleviate poverty and improve the living conditions of the rural poor has remained a major concern among scholars and development agencies in recent times. For instance, Franklyn, Mohammed and Obidi (2012) examined the level of ICT adoption and use in Agriculture in Adamawa state, Nigeria, by agricultural extension workers and farmers reported that the use of ICT in agriculture was very poor and was cycled mostly around GSM usage and a very insignificant number make use of computers and Internet. Also, Onwuemele (2011) studied factors influencing the usage of mobile phones by rural households in Nigeria and it revealed that level of education, income, social network and membership of groups are the major determinants of mobile phones ownership and usage. The study also revealed that mobile phones do have significant impact on some rural livelihood assets such as social capital and human capital.

Methodology

The study surveyed three (3) of the seven (7) village units in the Soye district of Bama local government

area. The district comprises of Abbaram, China, Kaliari, Kajeri, Jandiri, Sabsawa and Soye village units, with an estimated population of 18,000 people. (Soye District Head office, 2012). Simple random sampling method was used to obtain proportional figures of 300 people. The instrument used for data collection was a structured interview schedule designed by the researchers referred to as Rural Community Information Service Survey (RCISS). The administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistants. Three hundred (300) copies of the structured interview schedule were administered and two hundred and seventy five (275) were returned, representing 91.7% interview return. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage scores.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of the Respondents

Analysis of the characteristics of the respondents is useful in assessing the information needs profile of the people in the community. The age distribution of the respondents shows that majority, 190 (69.1%) of the respondents were between 20-40 years of age, which is regarded as the active age-group, while 85 (30.9%) of the respondents were between the age bracket of 40-50 years and above. The gender distribution of the respondents reveals that majority, 167 (60.7%) of the respondents were male, while 108 (39.3%) of the respondents were female. The study ensured that at least half of the respondents are female, because of the fact that rural women are actively involved in the socio-economic development of their communities in addition to

their household chores. Similarly, the level of educational attainment of the respondents shows that 36.4% of the respondents had no formal education, 21.8% had Quranic education, 14.5% had attended primary school, 12.7% had secondary education, and 7.3% possess Diploma/Degree certificates.

The distribution of the respondents by main and other occupation in a rank order reveals that 32.6% are engaged in farming and trading, 25.5% farming and animal husbandry, 16.4% farming and household work – mainly performed by women. The analysis further shows that 16.4% of the respondents are engaged in local crafts/industry, 5.5% are government agents and 3.6% are engaged in hunting and fishing. Further analysis of the nature of occupation performed by the respondents reveals that majority of the respondents are engaged in agriculture (farming, livestock husbandry and fishing/hunting) as their main occupation, besides petty trading and household work (cooking, fetching water, firewood, looking after children and other domestic chores).

Information Needs Profile

To determine the information needs profile of the respondents, their perceived information needs have to be established. Thus, they were asked whether they have information needs. Majority (72.7%) of the respondents indicated to have information needs, while 27.3% responded not having information needs. The respondents were further asked to indicate their specific areas of information needs. This is presented in Table 1 below in a rank order.

Table 1: Distribution of Specific Areas of Information Needs in a Rank Order

Areas of Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	89	32.4
Health	52	18.9
Government Programmes	40	14.5
Small Scale Industries	28	10.2
Education	20	7.3
Religion	20	7.3
Traditional Matters	10	3.6
Politics	10	3.6
Civic Matters	6	2.2
Recreation	-	-
Security	-	-
Total	275	100

Table 2: Nature of information Needed by the Respondents in a Rank Order

Nature of Information Need	Frequency	Percentage
To solve a problem	105	38.2
Find an answer to a question	98	35.6
Make difficult decisions	72	26.2
Total	275	100

Table 3: Existing Information Services Visited by the Respondents in a Rank Order

Existing Information Services Visited	Frequency	Percentage
District/Village Head Office	90	32.7
Primary Healthcare Centre	90	32.7
Agricultural Extension Office	80	29.1
Primary School Teachers	10	3.6
Community Development Office	05	1.8
Mass Literacy Centre	-	-
Public Library	-	-
Total	275	100

Table 1 shows the distribution of specific areas of information needs of the respondents. They are ranked in the order of their scores from the highest to the lowest. The table reveals that agriculture tops the list with 89 scores, representing 32.4%; health, 52 scores, representing 18.9%; government programmes, 40 scores, representing 14.5%; small scale industries, 28 scores, representing 10.2%; education and religion scored 20 each, presenting 7.3% traditional matters and politics with ten scores representing 3.6% each, civics matters with six scores representing 2.2%, while security and recreation recorded zero values. This hierarchical presentation of areas of information needs by the respondents reveals that rural people need information in almost all areas of integrated rural development programmes in order to improve their standard of living.

To determine the actual information needs of the respondents, the study sought to find out whether the respondents have experienced information needs in the last one month, six months or one year. Majority, 203 (73.8%) of the respondents indicated that they have experienced information needs in the period stated, while 72 (26.2%) of the respondents stated that they have not experienced any information needs during the period. Those that indicated actual information needs were further asked to state the nature of the information needed. This is presented in Table 2 in a rank order.

Table 2 shows the nature of information needed by the respondents. Majority (38.2%) of the respondents indicated that the nature of the information needed was to help them solve a problem, 35.6% was to find an answer to question, and 26.2% was to make difficult decisions.

Existing Information Services

One of the objectives of the study was to find out the utilisation of existing information services in the community by the respondents. Thus, the respondents were asked whether they are visiting the existing information services in the community. Majority, 120 (43.6%) of the respondents indicated that they do visit the existing information services in the community, 93 (33.8%) of the respondents indicated 'No', while 62 (22.5%) did not respond. The respondents were further asked to indicate the existing information services in the community that they visited. This is presented in Table 3 below in a rank order.

Table 3 shows the existing information services visited by the respondents in a rank order. They are ranked in the order of their scores from the highest to the lowest. The table reveals that the District/Village Head office and Primary Healthcare Centre recorded highest scores of 90 each, representing 32.7%; agricultural extension office scored 80, representing 29.1%; primary school teachers scored 10, representing 3.6%; community development office recorded five scores, representing 1.8%, while mass literacy centre and public library were not visited by the respondents.

The respondents were further asked whether they are satisfied with the information provided to them by the existing information services in the community. Thus, majority, 125 (45.5%) of the respondents indicated that they are not satisfied with the information provided to them by the existing information services they visited in the community, 95 (34.5%) of the respondents indicated that they are satisfied with information provided to them, while 55 (20%) did not respond to the question.

Awareness and Use of ICT Services among the People in the Community

Awareness and utilisation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) services such as (Global System Mobile Communication (GSM), Internet, Radio and Television broadcast) by the people of Soye Community was also examined by this study. Majority, 190 (69.1%) of the respondents expressed that they are aware of ICT services, particularly the Radio and Television broadcast and GSM only, 65 (23.6%) of the respondents are not aware of ICT services particularly the internet and GSM, while 20 (7.3%) of the respondents are aware of internet services but have no skill and place to access it.

Respondents were further asked on the frequency of use of ICT services. Majority, 110 (40%) of the respondents indicated that they use these services particularly Radio and Television broadcast, and GSM services occasionally. Only 63 (22.9%) of the respondents use these services regularly, 50 (18.2%) of the respondents expressed that they have never used these services, while 52 (18.9%) of the respondents had no response.

Similarly, majority of the respondents (58.2%) expressed satisfaction with the information they

received through these ICT services, particularly Radio, Television and GSM services. 18.2% of the respondents indicated that they are not satisfied with information they receive from these services, while 23.6% of the respondents had no response.

Table 4 presents data on areas where ICT services are accessed by the respondents. The analysis shows that majority 80 (29%) of the respondents have no places to access ICT services in the community, 60 (21.8%) of the respondents indicated that they access ICT services in their homes, i.e. this group of respondents own radios, television and GSM sets in their homes. Also, sixty (21.8%) of the respondents access ICT services in the cinema/commercial viewing centres, this group of respondents are mostly youths who use these services for recreational/ entertainment purposes such as watching films and sporting programmes. Community viewing centre is also one of the ICT service providers, where 16.4% of the respondents access information that deals with news and current affairs and government programmes. Fifteen (5.5%) of the respondents access ICT services in the neighbourhood, and 15(5.5%) of the respondents access ICT services, particularly GSM services from the commercial GSM service providers.

Table 4: Area where ICT Services are accessed by the Respondents in an Array

Places ICT services are accessed	Frequency	Percentage
No place to access ICT services	80	29
At home	60	21.8
Cinema/commercial viewing centres	60	21.8
Community viewing centres	45	16.4
In the neighbourhood	15	5.5
Commercial GSM providers centre	15	5.5
Total	275	100

Findings and Discussion

The findings revealed that majority of the respondents are engaged in agriculture (farming, livestock husbandry, fishing and hunting) as their main occupation. Furthermore, the results in Table 1 revealed that majority of the respondents (72.71.) have expressed perceived information needs in the following hierarchy: agriculture, health, government, programmes, small scale industries, traditional matters, religion, politics, civic matters, recreation and education. The respondents further indicated that they satisfy these needs by visiting the district/village head office, primary healthcare centre, agricultural extension office, primary school teachers and community development office. However, majority of the respondents (56%) indicated that they are not satisfied with the information provided to them by those agencies. Thus, this finding corroborates the study on information needs of rural dwellers for community

development in Nigeria, by Obaje (2011) which revealed that the common sources from which information is largely disseminated in rural areas of Nigeria remain through: Social welfare officers, health and agricultural extension staff, community leaders, local government staff, visitors from the city, mass media (radio and, in rare cases, television), market places, community/political meetings.

Majority of the respondents indicated that they do visit the existing information service providers in their community as shown in table 3. These major information service providers include the district/village head office, primary healthcare centre, agricultural extension office, primary school teachers and community development office. However, (45.5%) of the respondents expressed that they were not satisfied with information provided to them, while (34.5%) indicated that they were

satisfied with information provided to them. Whereas, (20%) of the respondents did not responded to the question. Thus, this finding is in line with Obaje (2011) that the state of information services in rural areas of Nigeria has not changed over the years because more attention is being given to public libraries in urban areas to the neglect of rural areas. This situation has resulted in rural people largely depending on the educated rural people and indigenous information systems. Similarly, Ottong and Edem (2007) reported the result of study aimed at identifying the library and information services in Calabar South rural communities showed that because of the unavailability of libraries, information services and infrastructures in the communities, the respondents depended largely on oral-based and unconventional sources of information like friends, community leaders, teachers and churches.

The results on Table 4 revealed that majority of the respondents (69%) were aware of ICT services such as radio and television broadcasts and GSM only, 7.3% of the respondents were aware of internet services but do not have the skills and place to access it, while (23.6%) of the respondents were not aware of ICT services particularly the internet. Thus, this finding supports the findings of Franklyn, Mohammed and Obidi (2012) that assessed the level of ICT adoption in agriculture in Adamawa state, Nigeria by using two study parameters; agricultural extension workers and farmers. The study reported that though there was high literacy among the extension workers and low literacy level among farmers, the use of ICT in agriculture was very poor and was cycled mostly around GSM usage. This could be due to the fact that none of the extension workers and only one of the farmers examined makes use of computers and a very insignificant number makes use of the internet. It is however interesting to note that all the respondents examined from both groups admit that they are willing to use or adopt ICT in agriculture, but lack of Internet access, ICT knowledge, access to personal computers, among others are the major challenges for the adoption ICT in Agriculture.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have a far-reaching implication for rural community information service providers. Firstly, access to reliable and usable information that would assist the rural people in improving their quality of life remains poor, since the quality of information provided to them by the existing information service providers does not satisfy their information needs. This might be due to the fact that community analysis and knowledge of the information needs of the rural people are not properly captured by the existing information service providers in the community. Hence, the

tendency of under-expressing the information needs of the people amount to denial of access to information that would improve their well-being.

Secondly, the quality of information provided to the people is largely driven by the demands of the moment, especially sensitisation and mobilisation of the people at the grassroots level for support and participation in various government programmes and activities. The mechanism for provision and dissemination of information is not based on the actual needs of the people.

Thirdly, the rural community information service supposedly based on the public library services is not utilized because the Borno state public library branch located in Bama, Headquarters of the Bama local government area is not providing community information services to the people in the rural areas. Consequently, the people rely on other agencies such as the district/village heads, extension workers, and primary school teachers, among others. Conversely, the high percentages of the information they provide to the people are irrelevant to their daily needs. Thus, the provision of information needed for total development of rural communities requires an urgent attention by the public libraries and other information service providers.

Conclusion

From results of the study, it can be concluded as follows; that rural people in the Soye district have identifiable information needs and these needs are satisfied by visiting the existing information service providers in the community. However, majority of the people expressed that they are not satisfied with information provided to them by these agencies. This could be due to lack of researching into the information needs of the people in the community by information service providers and tailoring their services to the particular needs of the community.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. The Borno State Library Board should mount a programme on rural community information service by posting Librarians to the various districts in the state as Library and Information Service Extension Officers. These Librarians can liaise with the divisional libraries in the local government headquarters and the district head offices in providing community information services to the people in the rural areas.
2. The Library and Information Service Extension Officers should collaborate with other information service providers in the rural areas by planning a comprehensive rural community information service programme that would provide quality development

information that would improve the quality of life of the rural people.

3. The District/Village Heads are the major source of providing information to rural people by virtue of their positions and closeness to the rural people, thus the Borno State Library Board should sensitise them on the mechanism of providing information and the importance of access to quality information in development process of rural communities in their domains.
4. Community participation in the provision and dissemination of information should be encouraged through regular consultation, meetings and discussions between the community members and the information providers. This would help in assessing and understanding the needs of the people so that information services should be tailored to the needs of the people. Involving the community and the information service providers to work together would help ensure that the community information service is appropriate to the needs of the people it serves.

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