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ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Libraries and information centres in rural communities are expected to be part of the infrastructure that are found in local communities in Nigeria. However, various literatures have shown that these libraries are hardly found in Nigeria. This is a challenge, which this paper aims at addressing. It examined the concept of community libraries and information centres, ways of establishing community libraries and information centres (especially through state and local governments, community self-help efforts constituency projects of representatives, philanthropists in the community, and projects of age groups), as well as the implications of community libraries as agents of rural development. The paper concludes that community libraries are expected to be part of the priorities of government for the people in the rural areas as a result of the various benefits of such libraries would add to the lives of inhabitants in the rural areas. Challenges of establishing such libraries were also identified, Recommendations were also made

Keywords: Community Libraries, Rural Areas, Rural Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

The continuous existence of man in the universe will be worthless without an access to and the use of information. This is because man is associated with various information needs that touch virtually all areas of his life, be it health, agricultural, business, or cultural. Therefore, making information available and accessible to man via appropriate channels of dissemination or communication, positions him for successful living. No wonder Esimokha (2013) posits that communication of information is life ... to communicate is to be alive, and to be alive is to communicate. Thus, communication of information is not only a vital ingredient, but also a necessity for human interactions and existence.

It is absolutely not negotiable that information plays critical roles in the growth and development of societies where the man operates from. Various kinds of information, such as agricultural information, health information, business information, socio-cultural information, scientific information, technological information and legal information are needed by individuals in the society for them to make effective decisions and implement programmes accordingly. Information sources of various kinds such as the libraries, the Internet, the mass media, organizations and associations, churches and mosques, ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of the government, are also expected to be actively involved in providing information and also addressing information needs of individuals in the society.

Information needs of people lead to the exhibition of various information seeking behaviours in order to find, access and retrieve relevant information from reliable information sources that will satisfy the information needs of the people. Cole (cited in Khayesi, Meyer and Machet, 2013) argues that information need is one of the most essential concepts in information science, which appears misunderstood. Thus, unlike the need for food, water, shelter or any other primary human needs, what is required to satisfy a piece of information is often not known to the individuals concerned. This implies that requisite information sources and service delivery patterns are expected to be provided, with corresponding resources that are available and accessible for addressing various information needs of the people in the society.

However, in rural areas, the information needs of the inhabitants are diverse, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted. One of the key information sources that should champion information provisions to the rural dwellers is libraries. Libraries are service delivery institutions, custodians of knowledge and centres of information dissemination, of which if such information is used and applied well, could modify users' behaviour as well as encourage a more-civilized and developed society (Ajegbomogun and Ajegbomogun, 2015). Unfortunately, libraries are hardly found in rural areas; and public libraries that are expected to have functional branches in the rural communities are nowhere to be found as well. Buttressing this, Emezie and Igwe (2016) reviewed various scholarly works and reported the absence of library and information services provision to rural dwellers, as well as absence of community information centres, for addressing their information needs in the Nigerian communities. This is worrisome, making Uzuegbu (2016) to ask whose job or responsibility is it to provide effective information services to rural dwellers in the sub-saharan Africa, especially Nigeria. Thus, this paper argues that establishing community libraries and information centres is the way to achieve this.

Community Libraries and Information Centres?

Various scholars and authorities use rural libraries, community libraries, rural information centres, community information centres, and community libraries and information centres interchangeably to describe libraries and information agencies located in the rural communities and professionally-managed by the library practitioners such as the librarians, the library officers and the library assistants for addressing diverse peoples' information needs in the locality. Momodu (2012) notes that such rural libraries have the capacity to meet the information needs of the rural dwellers in the areas of agriculture, education, health, politics, socio-economic information, culture and recreation. However, the establishment of these libraries remains a challenge in Nigeria.

Libraries in rural community and information centres are public libraries located in a rural area that provides the inhabitants of the locality with the services that are provided by public library. They have all the characteristics of the public library, but they are smaller and their patrons fewer than those in the urban setting (Akanwa 2013). In support of the above definition, Mbaqwu and Nwachukwu (2008) asserted that the rural library is a branch of public library, which has the same roles, functions and service like its master, the main difference is the location and characteristics of the area where it is located.

The characteristics of the individuals that make up the rural area where the library is situated must be taken into consideration before information materials are sent to them. Utor (2017) opined that information is vital to the rural dwellers in that it will not only make for better understanding and appreciation of government programmes, it will also encourage a closer link between the initiators and beneficiaries of the development efforts. Access to information and advice is a key resource for local people in maintaining active and independent lives. Access to information is also critical to letting people know their entitlement to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion Abissat, (2008).

According to Shrestha (2013), with their changing roles as centres for sustainable development, community information centres act as Vehicles for social and economic transformation in rural areas, with diverse facilities like library, Information and communication technology (ICT) outfit, women empowerment section, early childhood section, multimedia and communication section, as well as training / meeting hall.

Their possible information need are for personal development, job and economic enhancement, political and social awareness, culture stability and proper use of leisure. Those masses that form the main agricultural sector need to be encouraged on the necessity of using fertilizer, Insecticides and to avail themselves of the credit facilities meant for the average farmers. It is universally agreed that every individual whether literate or not, has information need.

Lyrrillidou (2013) revealed that information resources, facilities and service are the factor which influences users' satisfaction. For the rural library to fulfill its objectives which is attainment of users' satisfaction. It cannot do without resources and facilities not just when it was established but on a continuous basis.

Ways of Establishing Community Libraries and Information Centres

There are various ways that could be adopted for establishing community libraries and rural information centres in Nigeria. These include:

- i. **State and Local Governments:** State and local governments can establish community libraries as part of government programmes. It could be established as branches of public libraries owned by the state governments.
- ii. **Community Self Help efforts:** Members of a community may come together and decide to develop projects that will be beneficial to the inhabitants of the community. Such could be the establishment of community libraries.
- iii. **Community Projects of Age Groups:** Many communities are known for their various age grades and age groups. It is expected that age groups, especially those grown and matured as men, should develop notable community projects that will be named after them, as their contributions to community development. An age grade could adopt and establish a community library or rural information centre for the community.
- iv. **Constituency Projects of Representatives:** As we are in a democratic setting, a senator, house of representative member or house of assembly member can decide on establishing community libraries as constituency projects.
- v. **Philanthropists in the Community:** There are various individuals that are wealthy and blessed with riches the in various communities. These personalities can establish community libraries and donate them to their communities for the benefits of all community members.

Libraries in rural communities and Development

There is no doubt that community libraries are instruments of rural development. When situated in communities, rural libraries will be seen as agents of rural development. This is premised on the fact that development of people is central to all other forms of development. Developing the people will be from the angle of meeting their various information needs, ranging from agriculture, health, business, economic and social issues, among others. These will enable them in decision making and implementation for healthy living.

Libraries in rural area can also serve as platforms for training the people in basic literacy skills, acquisition of skills and even for facilitating adult education. In addition, such community libraries could also serve institutions for documenting and preserving the traditions, cultural practices, values and other indigenous knowledge of the people for reference purposes and future generations yet unborn.

Community Libraries and Rural Development

The community libraries or rural libraries are expected to have current print based information resources (books, magazines, Newspapers) as well as functional information and communication Technology components (computer systems with internet facilities, printers, fax machines, photocopies, television, and telephones). Momodu (2012) notes that such community information centres have the capacity to meet the information needs of rural dwellers in areas of agriculture, education, health, politics, socio-economic information, culture and recreation. Such rural dwellers like farmers, traders, artisans, community leaders, school children, out-

of- school children, women and women groups, private business in the community, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and local government authorities.

Community libraries help rural dwellers to improve chances for livelihoods. Various farming systems, including the small-scale type, are not left out, as they have a lot to benefit from information centre/library in the community with requisite facilities in the rural areas Kamba (2009) reports that the social networks of such farmer are strengthened because the people continue to develop themselves with information acquired from the information centres.

Mchombu (2003) notes that lack of access to adequate and right information at the right time to the rural communities undermines the efforts at improving the living conditions of the rural people by both government and non-governmental organizations.

Roles or usefulness of community Libraries and information centre

The community Libraries and information centres are expected to have current/ up- to – date print-based information resources (e.g books, Newspapers and magazines) functional information and communication Technology (ICT) component (computer systems with internet facilities, printers, fax machines, photocopier, television and telephones). Momodu (2012) notes that such community information centres have the capacity to meet the information needs of rural dwellers in areas of agriculture, education, health, politics, socio-economic information, culture and recreation. Such rural dwellers like farmers, traders, women and women groups, private business in the community, non-governmental organization, community based organization, and local government authorities.

Community libraries and information centres helps to get information to the rural populace t the right period for necessary development. Community libraries helps to improve chances for livelihoods, various farming systems including the small-scale type, are not left out as they have a lot to benefit from information centres with requisite facilities in the rural areas (Aina, 2007). Farmers have increased income because they belong to cooperatives that are able to respond appropriately to changes in market forces.

The provision of community information centres and library and its promotion would definitely enable rural dwellers to access e-government programmes and services thereby giving them a sense of digital inclusion, information to rural dwellers.

Outreach programmes need to be organized to meet he information needs of the rural population. The objectives are awareness of library and information resources and the creation of a reading habit among rural dwellers. Community libraries outreach programmes are a way to distribute library services across a large and sparsely populated rural area. Distance learning and other educational programmes can also ne extended to rural areas.

To effectively render selective dissemination of information services, the community librarian must have a profile of the chentele (Onyena *et al* (2015). When the information of the rural population is identified, such services will be relevant to them. Nigeria is a developing country where the majority of the population lives in rural areas. The majority of these rural dwellers are either non-literate or semi-literate. Libraries exist to serve as many people as possible, disseminating information, preserving culture and contributing to intellectual and social life. Hence information pertaining to fishing and farming activities of rural areas needs to be repackages in local language and disseminated to all categories of users.

Extending library services to children is essential for universal basic education to succeed for lifelong education in consonance with the national education policy, children need the library. Community libraries and information centres are expected to extend services to rural primary schools and daycare centres. The library is the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with the world that is where they acquire the general knowledge which

form the bases for all further learning.” Community library and information centres have a strategic role to play in disseminating information to rural dwellers.

Features of Rural Area

The village comm. Are smaller in area than communities the populate is also low. As the density of popl is low the people have intimate reshups to face –face contacts with each other. In a village everyone known each other.

Agriculture is the man occupation. Agriculture is the fundamental occupation of the rural people to forms the basis of rural economy. A farmer has to perform various agricultural activities for we need the occupation of other members. Usually, these members are from his family. Thus, the members of the entire family share agricultural activities. That is the reason why howry Ovelson has mentioned that farming is a family enterprise.

The rural people are in close contact with nature as most of their daily activities revolve around the natural environment. This is the reason why a ruralite is more influenced by nature than an urbanite. The villagers consider land as their real mother as they depend on it for their food, clothing and sheathe.

The village communities are homogenous in nature. Most of their inhabitants are connected with agriculture and its allied occupation though there are people belonging different castes religious and classes.

In rural society, social stratification is a traditional characteristic base on caste.

Social interaction in rural area are cordial. it is the family, which introduces the members to the customs, tradition and culture of the society.

In rural areas mobility is rigid as all the occupations are based on caste. Shifting from one occupations to another is difficult as caste is determined by birth. Thus, caste hierarchy determines the social status of the rural people.

The family controls the behavior of the individual. Generally, the father is the head of the family and is also responsible for maintaining the discipline among members. He manages the affairs of the family

The people in rural areas, all over the world, are engaged in dependent on various primary occupations, e.g agriculture, draining, cattle keeping, fisheries, forestry and mining. Out of these, agriculture is the most important occupation.

Challenges confronting the establishing and maintaining libraries and information centres in rural communities

There are various challenges faced by public libraries in establishing and maintaining libraries and information centres in rural communities. Opera (2008), had observed that tempo of public library development in the country in the years immediately after independence, and after the Nigerian civil war could not be sustained due to the following challenges:

1. Inadequate funding
2. Inadequate human resources
3. Poor Infrastructure
4. poor management
5. Irrelevant library stock

6. Lack of power supply

Inadequate funding: Lack of fund is always the reason for not providing some basic necessities of life in developing countries. To rural communities, the establishment of information centres is not an exception. Lack of fund is seen as the greatest problem libraries face. Public libraries are established by peoples' tax. The government changes in attitude towards public library provision by appropriating fund for rural library services will erase this long belief of poor funding. The government stands to gain in the longrun because where the life of the rural dwellers are transformed, their productivity develops and revenue generation from those rural areas become possible.

Inadequate Human Resources. Many rural areas lack libraries because of lack of human resources to be used. The state libraries or information professionals should take up the matter to the library and information science schools where conscious attention should be directed to producing man power requirement in public library as areas of specialization. On graduation these should quickly be employed and equipped to reader services with incentive in the rural areas.

Poor infrastructure. The observe of regular power supply is seen as a challenge because if a library or community information centre is to operate very well, it requires. At least power to run its electricity appliances.

There is no suitable building to house the material and human resources to serve the rural dwellers. Locating community information centres in obscure and remote places have often rendered them nearly irrelevant and useless.

In the early 70s, public libraries used to render mobile library services. Newvans should be purchases by the government to keep reinforcing the services that are provided in those remote areas.

Poor management. Individuals and stakeholders investing in community library and information centres always nurse the fear of poor management of the centre, hence refuse to invest their funds. It is suggested that the public libraries should always organize training for rural community library staff.

Irrelevant library stock. Rural dwellers need relevant, efficient, and current information. Camble (1994) opines that the success of rural information programmes rest squarely on the availability and use of quality information by rural development workers and rural people and that many rural development programmes have failed in developing countries because they were planned with insufficient relevant information.

Lack of information. This is a big challenge for farmers, artisans, and liss skilled workers is the lack of information in the language or form they would be able to access. Many of the developing countries in Africa have muth-ethic groups with their own language, yet the libraries and information centres provide information mainly in colonial languages such as English, French, Spanish, Portyguese German, etc. This poses a big challenge to the librarians and libraries in meeting the information needs of the people in the rural areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Government at all levels should be made to see the need to establish libraries in the community and information centres as veritable tools for sustaining rural development efforts, as it should serve as centres for extending government programmes and services to the rural dwellers.

The local Government, NGO, or individual philanthropists should be requested to donate money for procurement of audiovisual resources with which to enhance learning of the community inhabitants and create awareness of the current happenings. When adequate library services are provided users will be satisfied. Lack of satisfactions emanated as a result of unavailability of modern resources and services.

- Adequate funds should be made available for the acquisition of information resources and the provision of quality library services to the rural population.
- Training of man power to render the service should be well addressed. On the job training of staff in information and communication Technology (ICT) should be a continuous exercise in the libraries and information centres.
- Suitable policy frameworks be put in place for the establishment and management of community Library and Information centres in Nigeria. Legislator at the federal and state levels should sponsor bill for establishing and managing community information centres. It will contribute significantly to sustainable rural development.

Community libraries are expected to be part of the priorities of government for the people in the rural areas. This is due to various benefits of such libraries to the lives of inhabitants in the rural areas. However, the establishment of such libraries will be accompanied with challenges such as financial implications, appropriate location in the community, possibility of poor management, and absence of core library and information professionals for managing them.

Be that as it may, it is therefore expected that well-to-do individuals and community leaders should rise up to this challenge of establishing and managing community libraries. The benefits are enormous, as this will give the people a sense of belonging.

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