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A Survey of Strategic Information Services to Rural Farmers in Anambra East and West Local Government Areas of Anambra State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Lack of strategic information has been a major hindrance for agricultural development. Thus, effective information services for rural farmers underline the importance of sustainable agriculture. This survey was carried out in Anambra East and West local government areas of Anambra State. Three hundred and fifty seven (357) community dwellers were sampled through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and scorecard activities. There was also an FGD on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) personnel. Key Informant Interview (KII) was also used on the state and local government actors. It was discovered that rural farmers need information on agricultural loan, extension service workers and seedlings. They showed the evaluation of these information gaps by scoring them very poor. Moreover, the CSOs and the local government disclosed their challenges of rendering effective information services. Another discovery was that library services are not offered in the communities under study. Therefore, the study recommended that librarians should repackage information resources and services to include the rural dwellers as well as key into the activities of CSOs in order to render the services to which they are trained for.

Key words:

Agriculture, Information service, Farmers, Rural communities

Introduction

Information plays a key role in agricultural development and production. It is becoming increasingly focused on the issues of ensuring that value is recorded for services rendered (Saul, 2000). That is, achieving the impact of relevant information service delivery to farmers through increase in yield and improvement of livelihood. Undoubtedly, agricultural sector is one of the vital sectors in every nation's economy which requires adequate attention for sustainable food security. Hence, the traditional concept of information has started to change even from among the rural farmers. Some farmers are now looking for information instead of passively waiting and receiving it.

Clearly, Ofor (2014) stresses the importance of agriculture as a serious profession in other countries and questions the indifference with which people view it here. Indeed, agriculture is not a project. Agriculture is business. What is really needed is to target thousands of people to get access to right information at the right time (Adesina, 2014) so that smallholder farmers will profitably engage in enhanced rural incomes.

Significantly, many countries are being sustained by farming activities with the right information empowerment and adequate supports. For instance, Israel does not have water but it is one of the major exporters of vegetables, dairy products, citrus fruits, etc in the world (Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Relevant agricultural information has ensured that everyone manages the very little water the country has. Similarly, Food and Agriculture Organization (2014) at various levels of government in China serves as the major actors in actively promoting the establishment of an information service system in rural areas and have achieved significant results. Hence, an investment in rural information services for farmers has continued to arise.

The State Governor of Anambra state, Chief Willie Obiano, made agriculture the number one vision for the state and stated inter alia:

- *To reposition agriculture in Anambra state:*
- *To be among the top 3 in agricultural production in Nigeria*
- *To become No 1 in the production of rice, cassava, fish*
- *Within the next 4 years of his administration;*
- *Increase contribution to state GDP to at least 40% (Government of Anambra State, 2014)*

This is to help farmers achieve their objectives of improved agriculture and economic growth as well as contribute to the development of the society. Thus, it is not just information but calculated information dissemination that will result in resource allocation as the needs are aligned to the individual levels. Therefore, the role of library and information services to rural development is clear because information that is not communicated or shared is certainly useless. Farmers are keen to get information. There is need for strategic information services for rural farmers.

Statement of the Problem

Farming is a noble profession that puts regular food on the table as well has the capacity to affect the national development growth. This very old profession has continued to grow through reforms to meet the changing needs of the society. But lack of strategic information has been a major hindrance (Climate Change Agriculture Food Security (CCAFS), 2014). Perhaps, this is why farming especially in the rural communities seems to be the occupation of peasant people.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the rural farmers' satisfaction with information service delivery in their communities. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. identify the key players of agricultural information services at the local government level
2. find out the major information service providers to the farmers in the rural communities
3. ascertain farmers' satisfaction of information services through scorecard activities
4. know the kind of information the farmers need
5. examine the kind of information resources used in disseminating information to farmers in the communities
6. identify the challenges of information dissemination services to the farmers

Area of study

Anambra East and West Local Government Areas are surrounded by river and are located in the main heartland of the riverine territory of Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State. There is enormous land space in the local government areas which make them one of the major food providers for the State (Afritek, 2011). They are famously known for the cultivation of yam, cassava, potatoes, cocoyam, vegetables and different varieties of fruit trees, among others. There are ten communities each in Anambra East and West, respectively. It must be noted that the 2012 flood disaster in Nigeria affected the two LGAs. The whole of the ten communities in Anambra West LGA were covered with water while five communities in Anambra East were affected. Anambra West has Igala speaking communities in it which accounted for the bilingual tongue in the State. Both Local Government Areas have population of 152,149 and 167,303, respectively (Afritek, 2011).

Literature Review

The concern for relevant and effective information services for farmers has made the government to adopt policies that help farmers increase food production. The importance of the agricultural sector has long been recognized by the Government. In Bangladesh, government has been launching a range of development projects and programs in the agriculture sector in the line of National Agriculture Policy formulated in 1999 (Alam & Haque, 2014). The Nigerian government also has agencies and departments that were set up to manage agriculture for development and improvement of livelihood. These agencies are at the federal, state and local government levels. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at a workshop in Abuja announced policies on agriculture to include:

1. *Water voucher for women*
2. *Supporting the least irrigation system*
3. *Community based irrigation system*
4. *Small scale irrigation drives*
5. *Subsidy to buy small scale motorized farming pumps*
6. *Renewable solar energy to help in motorized pumps and irrigation in the communities (Adesina, 2014).*

Significantly, non-governmental organizations have been involved in information dissemination to farmers. Their activities have involved decoding information to farmers because some line items in the policies require good analysis for the message to be understood. According to the Voice to the People project (V2P) (2014), it brings transfer of knowledge and skills, technical advice and information to support the activities of farmers. For providing agricultural information to the farmers, GOs and NGOs have taken some time befitting initiatives (Alam & Haque, 2014). They also have access to free advisory services, Ofor (2014) surmised.

Conversely, information resources used in the rural communities include leaflets, policy documents, public address system, mobile phones, etc. Alam and Haque (2014) added that mass media methods in agricultural information are useful in reaching a wide audience at a very fast rate. Accordingly, Jimma (2014) believed that mass media, particularly radio broadcasting are among the technologies, which reach the rural community in Ethiopia. Radio remains the most powerful and yet the cheapest, mass medium for reaching large numbers of people in isolated areas. Live radio programs make farmers call in and share their experiences or ask for information in their own mother tongue, which was unthinkable few years ago (JDPC, 2014).

Several studies have disclosed the new type of cassava that is harvested in three months. This has been tested and approved but many farmers in the rural communities have continued to plant the type that stays under the ground for one year before harvesting. This is what information does to farmers and the agricultural extension services fail in this bid as well. Farmers need to know the government policies on agricultural loans, land and market indices.

Besides, changes from the use of local irrigation (Jimma, 2014) and the dry season farming are what relevant information aim to achieve. Leichman (2012) confirmed the drip irrigation to natural pesticides, Israeli innovations pulled through which is helping to fill hungry bellies everywhere, but particularly in the developing world.

Another information need of farmers is climate information services. WeAdapt (2014) pointed out that it helps farmers to protect against drought and take advantage of good climate conditions. Climate information can be a powerful tool in helping rural communities adapt to climate risk and plan effectively on crop resistance flood. A study of rural farmers' focus group participants' answer on the kinds of information they want and need to support their agricultural decisions when the climate is unpredictable showed that they would be happy to receive information about what to plant, when to plant and when the rainfall will start. They

also needed information on seeds (Climate Change Agriculture Food Security (CCAFS), 2014).

The rural farmers have often indicated their displeasure on the level of agricultural information services rendered to them. Farmers require different packages of information (Anunobi, Ogbonna & Osuchukwu, 2012)) as their needs and priorities change throughout the production cycle. The importance of information on marketing of agricultural goods help farmers to find out what their customer wants and supply them at a profit. This simply underlies the role of information and communication in agricultural marketing. The rural farmers need to be “market intelligence” to make future plans for the farm. Solagbade (2012) also stressed the value of information on getting a loan from a bank. Farmers need loan to acquire seedlings, farm tools and other sundry expenses on the farm.

Farmers need agricultural extension agents to get answers on issues. But a look at the ratio of information service workers to rural laborers, the users of service, is basically one to several thousands. In Litong district, the ratio is 1 to 10, 000 - a severe shortage of people to sufficiently meet the information demand (FAO, 2014). Again, farmers have always have issues with fertilizer. In Umueri and Umuobaanam in Anambra state complaint about timely distribution of fertilizer never stops. A farmer in Nando community bitterly complained:

They told us to fill the form for agric loan, we paid and filled the form.

They also told us to open account at Agric bank in Oyi. I borrowed money to do this but uptill now, they are yet to give me the money.

I heard that they have given some people. They keep telling us to come again and again and again (JDPC, 2014).

Unfortunately, rural information services come with challenges. According to FAO (2014) farmers have poor awareness of what is available and what they need and a poor capacity to accept information and technological services. Farmers' capacity to use information needs improvement, low farm income level limits access to information tools, low organization level of farmers and small-holder farmers lowers the efficiency of information services. There are also lack of fund, lack of proper human resources in information services in rural areas, lack of content and a need for improvement in the quality of information available are also among the challenges (FAO, 2014).

Methodology

This study assessed the progress of information services to farmers in Anambra East and West local government areas of Anambra state. The essential of this study were based on events that occurred in the local government and the changes in the local administration in the State.

Different tools were used in data collection. They were interviews at different phases of community engagement activities and score card specimen. These were carried out at different phases in order to gather comprehensive data based on evidence engagement. The phases are:

Phase 1: Repayment activity and review meeting of PROMIC (Promoting Micro Credit) program in Nando, Umueri, Umuobanam and Aguleri in Anambra East LGA and in Umuezeanam and Mmiataanam in Anambra West LGA. This is a monthly activity that measures the beneficiaries' progress in their petty trading and agricultural activities.

Phase 2: Targeted advocacy organized by JDPC during the voice to the people (V2P) project activity to the elected Chairmen, Ward Counselors, Supervisory Councilors, HODs and Information Officers in Anambra East and West LGAs at the local government headquarters in Umuobanam and Nzam respectively.

Phase 3: Policy pullout meeting with elected Ward Councilors, HODs of the LGAs, Information Officers and the V2P Team on sustainable rural development and community development in the local government under study on August, 2014. The stakeholders were interviewed.

Phase 4: Scorecard activity in the communities where community stakeholders, farmers, community based monitors and community members scored the performance of duty bearers and service providers as it affects farming in their communities. The integral concepts are targets and key performance indicators (**KPIs**). It applies perfectly to this study as the targeted participants are engaged overtime with the duty bearers. The indicators of the activities are carefully documented for onward measurement on satisfaction (Rouse, 2014).

The sample consisted of participants from the voice to the people (V2P) communities in both LGAs. V2P project is an on-going DFID funded project on giving voice to the poor and marginalized to hold duty bearers to account. It is supported by Christian Aid Nigeria and run by seven CSOs partners which JDPC is a lead partner. Thus, four pilot communities of V2P were used in each local government. The other participants are PROMIC beneficiaries who are mainly female. It is an on-going funded project from SwissHand Foundations, Switzerland that supports rural women with economic information based on promoting micro credit (PROMIC) for agriculture and petty trading. Promic is also in the LGAs understudy. The sample distributions are as follow:

Table 1: Distribution of rural farmers in both LGAs Anambra East

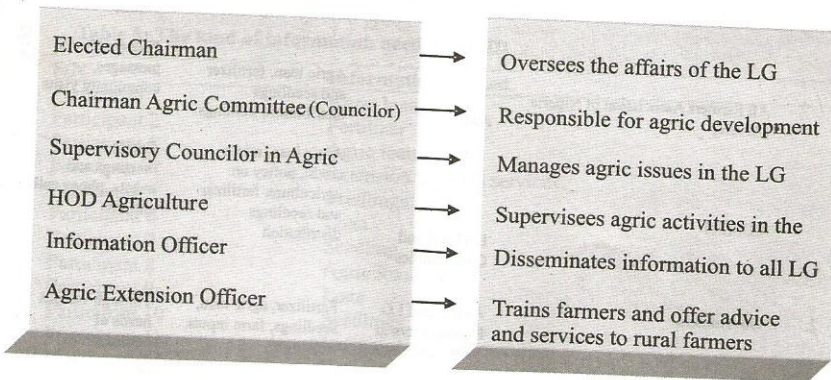
Age	Voice to the People Ppts		Promic Ppts		Age	Voice to the People Ppts		Promic Ppts	
	Male	Female	Male	Female		Male	Female	Male	Female
26 & above	36	54	-	120	26 & above	28	39	3	38
25 below	7	10	-	16	25 below	8	5	-	12
Total	43	64		136	Total	36	44	3	50

Table 2: V2P and Promic communities in both LGAs

S/N	V2P Communities	Promic Communities	S/N	V2P Communities	Promic Communities
1.	Umueze-Anam	Umuezeanam	1.	Nando	Nando
2.	Orometiti	Mmiata	2.	Umueri	Umueri
3.	Nzam		3.	Umuoba-Anam	Umuoba-Anam
4.	Innoma		4.	Eziaguluotu	Aguleri

Findings

Fig: 1 Identification of key players in agricultural information services at the local government areas under study



This Fig illustrates the LG operating model as structured by key stakeholders that streamlined the roles of each government actor as it concerns agricultural services and information for rural farmers at the grassroots level. It shows the synergy among these government actors in linking of effective outcomes to agricultural information

Table 3: Major information service providers to the farmers in the rural communities

S/N	Organizations/Institution	Location	Information given	Mode of information distribution
1.	Civil Society Organizations (CSOs):			
	Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)	Onitsha	Information policies on agriculture, agric loan, micro credit, skill acquisition, fertilizer, seedlings distribution, training and market outreach	Sensitization, Phone calls and messages, meeting with heads of various communities groups', attending communities' meetings and events, Live radio program on Sapientia radio, public address system, and bulletin announcements.
	Care for the Physically Challenged and Destitute Foundation (CAPCAADF)	Awka	Micro credit, agric grant for people with disabilities (PWDs)	Awareness and sensitization of PWDs, phone calls and messages, heads of various communities groups', attending communities' meetings and events,
	All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN)	Awka	Agric loan, fertilizer and seedlings distribution, trainings.	Phone calls and messages, community visits
	COMEN	LG level and Communities	Agric loan, micro credit, policy on agriculture, fertilizer and seedlings distribution	Community meetings and events, phone calls and sms
2.	Government	Awka, and LG Headquarters in Nzam and Umueri	Fertilizer, agric loan, seedlings, farm inputs, training	Through various heads of communities' groups, sms
3.	Library	-	-	-

This Table shows the known providers of information to the rural farmers in Anambra East and West LGAs. They are the CSOs and the government actors in their LGAs. Their locations, information provided and mode of dissemination are clearly itemized in the table above.

Table 4: Farmers' satisfaction of services through scorecard activities

S/N	Categories	Agric loan	Agric grant	Fertilizer	Seedlings	Agric inputs	Extension service
1.	Good	✓ 5		✓ 31			
2.	Fair	7		78			
3.	Very poor	* 49	* 27	* 3	* 25	* 44	* 98

This was aggregated from the total sample of participants (see Table 1 on the methodology). The greatest number of participants indicated that information on extension service, agric input, agric loan and seedlings are very poor and hardly get to them. Agric loan and fertilizer were scored fair. Only few participants scored good on agric loan.

Information resources used in disseminating information to farmers in the communities

Interview and FGD disclosed that radio program, leaflets, policy pull out, budget documents, extension service contacts, etc were freely given with explanation on how to get what they want from the stakeholders. The COMEN Chairman of Anambra West during interview stated

"I saw the budget document and the policy pull out and I wondered.

But why can't the government provide the things they planned for?

We will use this tool for engagement in our local government".

Table 5: The kind of information needed (FGD)

S/N	Information needed
Participant 1	Agric loan
Participant 2	Fertilizer
Participant 3	Agric loan
Participant 4	Extension workers services
Participant 5	Seedlings
Participant 6	Loan
Participant 7	Seedling
Participant 8	Agric loan
Participant 9	Loan
Participant 10	Seedlings
Participant 11	Extension workers services
Participant 12	Extension workers services
Participant 13	Inputs
Participant 14	Loan
Participant 15	Input

Out of the 15 participants, six wanted information on agricultural loan, three on agric extension services, two on agric inputs, three on seedlings and one on fertilizer.

A participant explained:

We need to know when to access loan, especially government loan. The other time, I heard they filled forms but I didn't hear the information and many people here, did not

Another participant stated:

if somebody lends you money here, you pay it back with 100% interest. It is so bad. We need to know when government distributes seedling. The other day we heard some people were given in Awka. We did not get. Also to tell us in goodtime about flood. It spoilt all our crops that time it happened

**Table 6: Examining the challenges of information services to the farmers:
From the rural farmers:**

S/N	Items	Reasons
Participant 1	Late information	Information comes late, like agric loan. When you hear it, it has gone
Participant 2	Language	Some of them speak big English and some of us cannot read the information resources
Participant 3	GSM operation	I can only answer calls with the phone. I don't know how to open message. So if you send only message without calling, I will miss the information. Many of us are like that
Participant 4	Distance and location	We cannot go to Awka, it is far and where is the transport money? Let them bring their office here and share the seedlings and other things
Participant 5	Inadequacy of information	When they bring information it is not complete. They told us to open account for loan to be paid. Some of us did but until now, no further information on who to meet and when to come for the money
Participant 6	Promise and fail	Government will say it will provide seedlings, etc but it does not. So when they come, I will busy myself in the farm
Participant 7	Bad network	Network is not always here.
Participant 8	Wrong time	They come on the market day. I will not leave my wares to attend the meeting
Participant 9	Bad network	Network is not working always here.
Participant 10	Wrong time	They come on the market day. I will not leave my wares to attend the meeting
Participant 11	Wrong time	They come on the market day. I will not leave my wares to attend the meeting
Participant 12	Mobile phone	I can only answer calls with the phone.
Participant 13	Late information	Information comes late, like agric loan. When you hear it, it has gone
Participant 14	Government people	They are not serious with us. They don't care
Participant 15	Government people	They are not serious with us. They don't care

The challenges given by the farmers are intriguing. They all have things to say about not being served as they want. Their reasons are expressed in the data above.

Table 7: From Information service providers:

S/N	Items	Reasons
Participant 1	Distance and location	Some of these communities have difficult terrain. For instance, during rainy season you can't go to Nzam, Innoma and Eziaguluotu except by river. Some of us are afraid because they can't swim. Then the roads to Nando and Orometiti are also very rough and jagged
Participant 2	GSM services	Probably because of the location, you cannot get them especially when the information is urgent and needs immediate action
Participant 3	Low education of the farmers	Some of these rural farmers are not educated. They neither their sms nor the information resources. They have the information tools that can change their lives but they cannot access it.
Participant 4	Mistaking CSOs for politicians that give money and gifts	They have this notion of viewing anybody who comes to them from outside as people that bring money and gift. We are not politicians, we do development service but they are only interested in incentive not information materials. It affects their knowledge capacities
Participant 5	Limited resources	Our organization cannot cater for every rural dweller. Our budget cannot carry it. We serve only limited number
Participant 6	Inadequacy of cooperation from rural farmers	Some of these dwellers cannot do what you tell them. We told them about cooperative because that is the prerequisite for government loan. Till now, many of them have not formed cooperative. Some of them said they don't trust their people that they don't want government to lock them if they don't pay

From the stakeholders at the LG:

We need adequate resources to go round the communities for information services. Though we do all we could to get across to their leaders and pass the information.

The HODs of Agricultural department: We cannot do anything without directives from Awka. They are in charge of agricultural inputs, seedling, extension services, fertilizer, everything. Information on these comes from Awka.

Information Officers: Some of these communities are cut off and located across the river, especially the sites in Anambra West. Sometimes, you give information, either they do not understand or they prefer the old way. Sometimes, when you send information, there is no feedback. But we still do our part

Director Extension services: Out of 177 communities in Anambra State, there are only 75 extension workers. They cannot cover their information responsibilities to the all the farmers and communities.

Analysis

The analysis in Fig. 1 disclosed the roles government plays in agricultural information services to the rural dwellers. This is because food security is important as well as providing gainful employment of the citizenry. Perhaps, this is why Chief Willie Obiano, made agriculture the number one vision for Anambra (Government of Anambra State, Nigeria (2014). But then, it is neither the policy statement nor the number of stakeholders that are important. It is the government being actively effective in promoting the establishment of information service system in rural areas in order to achieve significant results that matter (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2014).

The finding on the major information service delivery (Table 3) in the rural communities under study shows that library has no stake in Anambra East and West LGAs. There is of course no library or any form of information center in the LGAs. Probably this is why there are no library/ information services in the areas. But must there be a building labeled library before librarians' presence must be felt in a community? What happens to barefoot librarians? They must generate innovative concepts that represent concrete impact on libraries and the people they serve. It is now time for librarians to rethink what library is all about, what is needed, what will be used and what is sustainable in our environment (Issak, 2000). However, that NGOs render information services to rural farmers show that some organizations offer "mission possible": Hence, information services even to the remote community can be achieved.

Amazingly, the participants' scorecards (Table 4) signify the feelings of the beneficiaries in terms of agricultural information. What with the unnerving number of "very poor" and "fair" in items that are supposed to boost their agricultural activities. This is simply saying that the need for the option on extension services and other information should be repackaged so that agricultural information, programs and knowledge for small scale famers (Brenda, 2011) should be viewed seriously. The rural dwellers score said it all. There is no information for rural farmers in Anambra East and West.

That the farmers need urgent information (FGD) on agric loan and seedlings indicated that they are poor and need empowerment for sustainable agricultural

activities. This is what Solagbade (2012) emphasized that valuable information on getting a loan from a bank is very essential since farmers need loan to acquire seedlings, farm tools and other sundry expenses on the farm. Conversely, Offor (2013) reiterated that farmers can ask for grant or subsidy instead of loan.

Besides, the answers given pointed out the farmers' verdict on establishing offices or city information centers in the community. This relates well with the study of FAO (2014) which revealed the farmers' complaint that offices or city information centres are all located in the city or in the county proper, usually more than 10 km, or farther, away from rural areas. It is not convenient for farmers to go to the town only for a consultation. Perhaps if the offices have branches in the communities, the rural farmers can access it more.

On challenges of effective information services on Table 7, some farmers listed late information, language, educational standard, unfavorable policy, etc. This collaborates with Onwubiko's (1999) confirmation that language barriers, poverty affect rural information. The issue of low literacy affects information since many of them cannot understand instructions or directives given in support of their agricultural activities. Again that the development practitioners (NGO officials) commented on their being mistaken as politicians by the rural farmers explains the level people have relegated information to. That is, always seeking for cash and gift instead of sustainable means of achieving a goal. There is also the challenge of poor funding, lack of resources, difficult terrain, inadequacy of agricultural extension workers (Ogunrombi & Amadosu, 2005) which affect the local government roles in information services. This points to the need for the government to adjust some policies and think of creating enabling environment for relevant information for rural farmers.

Conclusion

The need for information services to rural dwellers as veritable tool for agriculture is obvious, considering the fact that they support and supply the value chain of food security. Hence, the smart solutions for better agriculture and safer food storage are essential. They all hinge on effective information services. The lessons learnt from this study show that dissemination of information to adopt agricultural reformation across the communities will strengthen the farmers' efforts and support their economic activities. Information service is not a one off activity. It is a process that requires updating and continuous searches. Libraries can be part of it all by using

their special training in acquiring and packaging what is really needed by the rural dwellers.

Recommendations

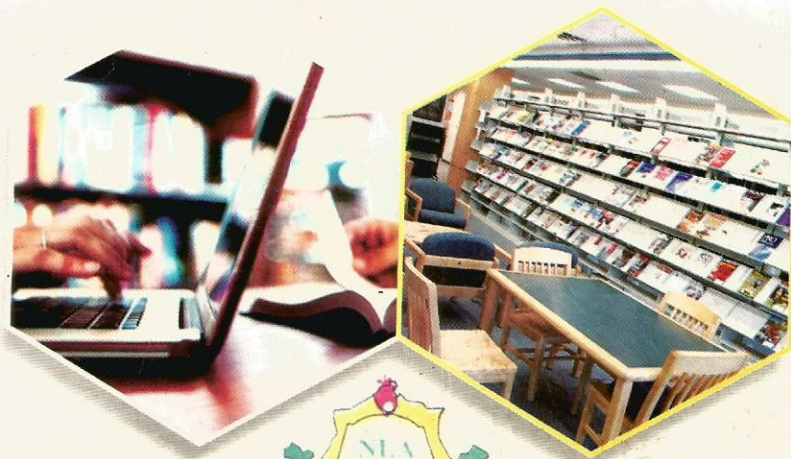
- Government should redesign its policies to accommodate rural dwellers' needs for agricultural information services.
- Libraries should collaborate with non-governmental organizations and key into their activities for real information services.
- Much as information dissemination is important, it is also pertinent that educating the rural dwellers on use of mobile phones will be of tremendous help in accessing information.

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Image Building Strategies for Public Libraries in Nigeria

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Abstract

Public libraries are often viewed as true repositories of knowledge, covering all forms of information sources, but most public libraries do not actually reflect this view as they fail to meet users' needs satisfactorily. They do not provide current materials; they do not have adequate skilled manpower, and do not upgrade their facilities in tune with emerging trends. All these factors and more tend to create low image for the public libraries. Thus, this paper highlights the strategies for building the image of public libraries in Nigeria. The paper revealed that poor funding is one of the major problems militating against effective operation of public libraries. It also maintains that public relations can play a key role in building the image of public libraries in Nigeria. Hence, the paper recommends the provision of adequate funding; provision of new technologies, etc. Adequate funding will enable public libraries purchase the requisite technologies to improve their services and provide satisfaction to their users.

Key words

Public Relations, image building, public libraries.

Introduction

How well an organization performs in its business determines its image among its various publics. Public relations is about image-making. It builds, maintains and protects the reputation of an organization; private or public. The public library as a clientele-driven organization needs effective public relations. Ezeani (2004)

observes that the work of public librarians has indeed gone beyond answering questions or finding physical copies of materials through the use of catalogues, stacks and shelves, to a stage where their communicative value has to improve. The library has to communicate its services to the outside world in order to bridge the information gap.

Writing on the concept of public libraries communicating their services to the outside world, especially in this technology-driven age, upgrading the resources of public libraries and evolving well-developed publicity measures through which the users, both actual and potential, could be informed of available resources and services becomes imperative. Ali (2002) believes that publicity yields image and that subject to adequate information, the image of any subject can be what it truly is. He also states that image is not a cosmetic afterthought; it is central to how one's business is regarded.

Beyond its external publics, the perception of the public library staff roundly matters. Thus, this paper highlights the strategies for building the image of public libraries in Nigeria. It justifies the need for effective public relations in public libraries in Nigeria.

Public Libraries in Nigeria Today

The public library often referred to the poor man's university functions to serve the population of the society where it is situated. It is a place where people may go for all kinds of information and knowledge. According to Eze (2008), "public libraries are established by the government for the use of the populace." They are established to cater for the educational, recreational, research and information needs of members of their communities. Their collections are as diverse as their users.

UNESCO sees the public libraries as: Those that serve the population of a community or region free of charge or for a nominal fee. They may serve the general public or special categories of the public such as children, members of the armed forces, hospital patients, prisoners, workers and employees. Aguolu (2002) describes it as the society's memory, standing in the same relationship as the human memory does to an individual. The society draws upon library in the same way that an individual draws upon his memory to meet his varied needs.

Writing on the theme "Libraries build community," Sarah Long (2010) strongly opines that: "The library always serves as a special place in the community. It's not only a place to find information and knowledgeable librarians; it's also a place to be

with other community members. Think of the library as a community's living room.' By living room, the public library is a place in the society open to general use. It is akin to the living room, which is a room in private house for general use. Public libraries serve every member of the society. They offer special services to meet the varied needs of the populace, the able and the disabled.

According to Achebe (2005) "the public library is an agency for self-education and continuing education for all members of the community." She maintains that "public libraries are also schooling centers for knowledge and information acquisition as well as civilization of people." To be able to accomplish its function as an agency for self-education, continuing education and schooling centre for knowledge and information acquisition, public libraries should be well-equipped with relevant resources to meet the needs of their users.

However, the public libraries in Nigeria today have come down with the problem of low image following certain challenges that face them. Such challenges include the following:

- **Funding:** This remains one of the major challenges of public libraries in Nigeria. According to Iorhuna (2007:B5) budgetary allocations to public libraries are infinitesimal. He believes that 'as infinitesimal as these allocations are, they are seldom released as appropriated. The consequence has been the sorry state of public library structures, facilities, materials and services, including disenchanting workforce.'
- **Inadequate support from the professional body:** Though the Nigerian Library Association has made itself relevant in the discussion and promotion of libraries, it has not really made adequate effort to press it upon the governments to see the need for putting the public libraries at the forefront of the mass literacy campaign. Issues of public libraries are left in the hands of state directors of library services. Nnaji (1986) observes that 'the most depressing aspect of library movement in Nigeria is the inactivity of the professional body.'
- **Erratic electricity power supply:** The problem of erratic electricity power supply is one that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of public library service delivery. Constant and stable power supply is a requisite factor for effective library operations. Apart from ensuring improved lighting of the reading halls, stable electricity supply guarantees comfort since the fans and other electricity-driven gadgets would be functional.

- **Inadequate professional staff:** There is a paucity of professional staff in public libraries. This makes it difficult for public libraries to adequately undertake such core professional duties as cataloguing and classification of their materials. Professional librarians often prefer to work in academic and special libraries where they could be better remunerated.
- **Inadequate facilities and resources:** Inadequacy of facilities occasioned by poor funding and lack of interest by the state governments is also one of the challenges of public libraries. There is inadequacy of reading space, desks and chairs, computers, photocopiers, scanners, internet services, all types of formats of library materials, etc. This does not only make for inability of the library to satisfy users' needs but also affect the image of the library negatively.
- **High cost of resources:** The cost of procuring materials for the libraries is very high. This exorbitance in cost is partly contributed by high rate of import duties. The high cost of importation of library materials into the country makes affordability difficult. Generally, the high cost of resources leads to inadequacy of materials.
- **Lack of publicity:** Public libraries in Nigeria hardly make use of publicity. They do not communicate extensively their services and resources to their clientele. They merely make use of such information services as Current Awareness Services (CAS), displays, Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI), etc. Some public libraries do not even have signposts indicating their locations. This has its effects on the place of public libraries.
- **Inadequate government support:** The absence of substantial support from state governments for public libraries is evident in dwindling book votes for the libraries. This affects the perception of public library workers by other public library publics.

These challenges affect the performance of the libraries, making their users to seek alternative sources to satisfy their information needs. However, the image of public libraries in Nigeria can be built using certain strategies.

Image Building in Organisations

Image refers to perception. It entails the publics' evaluation of an organization's messages and their attitude towards the organization. Image proceeds from how the organization manifests itself before its publics. The image of an organization can

vary among its publics. It could change over time because it is not consistent. The image of an organization over a long period of time translates into reputation which refers to what the publics know about the organization and their attitudes based upon such knowledge.

Jefkins (1998) identifies several kinds of image. He posits that the mirror image is the one people in an organization, especially its leaders, believe to be the impression outsiders have of the organization. This could be an illusion bred on wishful thinking because knowledge and understanding of outside opinion is lacking.

The current image is the one held by people outside the organization, and it may be based on experience or on poor information and understanding. The wish image is the desired image, the one the management wishes to achieve. Again, it is not so much a favourable or preferred image as a true one. The corporate image is the image of the organization itself rather than of the products or services. The corporate image may be made up of many things such as the company history, financial success and stability, quality of production, export success, industrial relations and reputation as an employer, social responsibility, and research record.

It is through communication, publicity that an organization gains the kind of image it wants for itself. Publicity is a product of communication. To win favourable image, public libraries must engage in planned and sustained communication, one that is based on the truth, keeping its publics abreast with developments, responding to their queries and creating for mutuality sake, a feedback mechanism.

Contemporary Approaches to Image Building in Organisations

Knowing that there is a strong correlation between the public's perceptions of an organisation and supportive behaviour or meaningful patronage, various organisations, over the years have evolved strategies for building their corporate image. These strategies include promotions and rebates, rebranding, publications, corporate social responsibilities and well-thought out communications. For the public libraries, such strategies would include promotion through publicity could come in the form of Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services, Current Awareness Services, annual reports, press releases, newsletters, displays, lectures and talks, regular-user awards, organizing essay and quiz competitions for schools in conjunction with private organizations and individuals, among others. In all, consistent adoption of public relations strategies can yield a positive image for the library.

Ezeani (2004) states that 'the operation of successful library services relies heavily on effective application of public relations skills and careful planning of public relations strategies.' Through public relations strategies, public libraries would create an image or identity in the minds of their users; the people would be aware of resources and services because availability of materials would be promoted.

Strategies for Image Building in Public Libraries

i. Public Relations:

The word *public*, according to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2003), is seen as "relating to or involving people in general, rather than limited to a particular group of people." For the purpose of this work, public refers to every member of the society who is interested in the public library, who is affected by the activity of the library, and whose opinion can affect the public library. On the other hand, according to Harper-Collins Concise English Dictionary (1999), *relations* refers to "social, political, or personal connections or dealings between or among individuals, groups, nations, etc." In this context it means links, contacts or dealings between people; that is the relationship between the library and its clientele, both actual and potential.

Public relation is the work or process of presenting a good image of an organization to the public; it has to do with providing information about an organization's activities to its publics. The publics of an organization often carry in their minds what the image of the organization is before them. This image would proceed from the way the organization relates with them. Aware of this reality, public libraries should evolve measures for winning favourable climate of opinion, positive image, from its various publics. To achieve this, there is a need for constant communication aimed at creating mutual understanding and acceptance, harmonious interaction and favourable consideration. And, the act of pursuing the above is known as public relations. It is concerned with what people think about an organization or how they feel about it.

According to Jefkins (1998), "public relations consist of all forms of planned communication; outward and inward, between an organization and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives concerning mutual understanding." It could be observed from the above definition that a well-planned adequate communication is a requisite condition for the achievement of organizational objectives. Both the immediate and extended publics of public libraries should be

taken into consideration in the course of planning communication process for mutual understanding. Their cooperation should matter to the Library. To gain public support and understanding, public libraries should be able to gather, interpret and evaluate the opinions of their publics. It should plan and communicate along the lines of mutual understanding. The effort of public libraries geared towards communicating with their publics must be heartfelt and honest. It should not seek to misinform or deceive.

Public relations is image-oriented. The perception of the people of a person, an organization or its services determines a great deal of things. It determines how serious its policies and services could be received by its publics. It decides where and how the organization is placed by its publics in the scheme of ordinary things. In the final analysis, it determines how well the organization performs in its business. This is to say that gaining favourable public opinion, which translates into positive organizational image, is the objective of public relations.

The World Book Encyclopedia (1995) defines public relations as “an activity aimed at increasing communication and understanding between an organization or individual and one or more groups called publics.” Through increased communication, an organization wins and retains cordial relationship with its publics. Not only that, increased communication begets improved publicity. Thus, according to Ali (2002), “publicity yields image, and subject to adequate information, the image of any subject can be only what it truly is.”

Public Relations in Public Libraries

The public library as a social institution has its publics. Thus, it has to engage in planned communication activities aimed at mutual understanding between it and its publics. Similar to businesses that seek to maximize profits, favourable image and quality services is the bottom-line of the use of public relations in public libraries.

Public librarians may raise their eyebrows where a patron defines the public library as “a public building where books are kept, and where people go to read their personal books.” The definition, no doubt, is a misunderstanding of the functions of public libraries. Public libraries function to provide for the information needs of community to support their educational efforts (both formal and informal); to encourage purposeful use of leisure; to promote and protect their cultural heritage, to encourage reading habit, etc. However wrong, possibly, the definition is an expression of the patron's perception of a public library; the image or personality presented to him by the public library and its personnel.

Talking about public relations in relation to public libraries, the first pertinent question is: do public libraries need public relations? According to Jefkins (1998) "public relations concerns any organization, commercial or non-commercial. It consists of all communications with all the people with whom an organization has contacts."

Public libraries as public institutions should constantly engage in planned, deliberate and sustainable measures through which they would notify their publics of available resources, ambitions and other services introduced into the library setting. This yields goodwill. Goodwill demands good deeds and good deeds beget acceptance. The good deeds of an organization should be in the interest of the organization and its publics. Sustained goodwill builds positive image for an organization. Favourable impression equals positive image. Positive image does not just come to an organization; there must be an active and conscious effort exerted to create in the minds of the publics the image the organization wants them to have of it.

According to the Ohio Library Council, as retrieved from the website, www.olc.org/marketing/4pr.htm, the following are the concepts that good public relations can communicate, establishing a clear corporate identity or image and disseminating a clear message about library missions and goals:

- Libraries are a great place for Kids
- Libraries bridge the information divide
- Libraries protect our right to know
- Libraries connect people with ideas, information and each other.
- Libraries are for everyone
- Libraries are shared community resources
- Libraries support productive workforce
- Libraries are community information centre
- Libraries foster community identity
- Libraries are a source of community pride
- Libraries are a 'port of entry' for people to learn more about their new community.

- Libraries support a community of readers
- Libraries provide global reach and local touch.

Public libraries in Nigeria can perform better in their functions of creating and strengthening reading habit in children; supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels; providing information services to their publics, etc, by clearly communicating with their publics in a manner that enables them establish clear corporate identity and disseminating clear messages about their missions and goals. This will no doubt gain them positive image.

Odi (1996) believes that the library '...is a producer of public services, a catalyst for human interaction, a social system and a cultural laboratory; it is all these and more, but only in societies where people's imaginations and sensitivities have been sufficiently awakened to its vital functions.'

Public libraries in Nigeria would be just as relevant to the extent they are able to communicate their positions and services to their communities. Apart from creating awareness and drawing attention to their services or increasing their clientele strength, through effective public relations, public libraries would be able to build positive image, increase their funding, and win the confidence of their publics, no matter what alternatives are available to them.

Public relations in public libraries can also take the form of the public libraries being more user-need oriented than being collection-driven. This is the view of Onwubiko and Onu (2002) when they say that: 'libraries, with the adoption of marketing principles in the provision of services will now become client-oriented which is the *raison d'etre* for the establishment, rather than product-oriented when they develop their collections extempore, without the information needs of the client groups taken into cognizance nor the awareness created on the resources and services of the library.'

Reinforcing further, Onwubiko and Onu opine that 'with this, collection development activities in libraries must be based on a thorough and systematic survey of the community served and analysis of their information needs. A collection that embraces all formats and covers all shades of opinion will be developed. This will definitely make the library an indispensable source of information in the community.'

By marketing principles, they imply that public libraries must of necessity adopt such elements of marketing as promotion, public relations, advertising, etc. By

adopting these elements, they would be able to acquire, process and disseminate information based on user-demand. That is as a matter of fact, when they become client-oriented.

Odi (1996) observes that 'as a process, public relations is a key element of administration. It consists of ideas, informing others, learning from others, being sensitive to how others feel about the library services, and measuring how people feel. It is about using this information as a basis for proposing new library programmes and modifying existing ones.'

Odi further posits that 'libraries approach public relations from a different perspective. They are concerned with better services to the people, ascertaining community's needs and desires, seeking public support for library programmes, evaluating the effectiveness of existing programmes and reacting to community problems promptly and decisively.' He maintains that '... Nigerian libraries would be launching, through public relations, a revolution as much cultural as epistemological. By adopting the processes and procedures of public relations, they would have taken a decisive step to transform the framework through which people view the book and through the book the library itself.'

The public librarians can also communicate and win the interest of their publics through what Aguolu (2002) terms "atmospherics." He states thus, 'the final area of promotion is atmospheric. This simply refers to the physical interior or exterior beautiful design of a company's building to suit the specific purpose of people that transact business with it. In relation to the library, it should then be an attempt to design the library building with consideration to the people who will use it and for the purpose it will serve. This is to make library a pleasant place where users can beautifully conduct a properly coordinated and systematic research.'

Winston Churchill opines that "we shape our buildings and later our buildings shape us." The physical disposition of a public library structure should be alluring and imposing. The surroundings should constantly maintain a decorous air, giving it a true library ambience. This extends to the interior of the library and can be achieved through a combination of perfect lighting, balanced colour combination, space, furniture and other physical arrangements aimed at the comfort and relaxation of the users. The library building should be befitting enough to shape the attitude of the users within the library and their perception of the public library. Dilapidated building and rickety shelves would tell of negative or low image.

Onwubiko and Onu (2002) note that 'if a library turns to be an uncomfortable place to be, uncondusive for study, it does not feel right to the patron; and the layout is

such that users have to roll all over the building to locate required materials, they will not spend any more time than they have to in such a library.'

Like the building, availability of operational official staff vehicles communicates the acceptance of the public library and its recognition within the internal publics; the same could be said of enhanced pay packages for the library staff.

Public relations in the public library can also be extensively used in the area of weeding. In the context of this topic, weeding refers to the removal of obsolete materials from the library. As Keenan and Johnston (2000) put it, "weeding is the act or process of 'discarding from stock materials that are considered to be of no other use. It is also called deselection or negative selection.'" It is a necessary activity in public libraries. Talking about the need for weeding, Obi (1977) writes "these books serve only to make the library dull and hide good books, which the (public) librarian has taken pains to put here." He further says that "it is never easy to throw things away, and sometimes it is difficult to decide which books to keep and which to eliminate."

This is also the view of Will (2003) who says that "it is the hardest thing in the world to explain to taxpayers why we are throwing away perfectly good books."

The public library should make advance publicity its public relations strategy in the event that it wants to weed. It tells of flexibility and readiness for mutual understanding. This would douse the fire of unnecessary complaints and criticism. It is not a happy experience that a user made use of a book in the library and next day he is told that weeding took place after he had left the library. There should be adequate communication in this respect.

ii. Public Services Librarians as Image-Makers:

The public services librarians are the front-desk officers of the public library. Thus, their dressing, manner of speech and general attendance to the problems of their clientele communicate the place of the library to the users. Onwubiko and Onu (2002) state that "public services staff in libraries generally have the greatest bulk of patron contact and perhaps do the most to influence the attitude of the client groups towards the library. This does not mean that staff in other areas of the library do not have their own impact to make."

Ezeani (2004) observes that "saving the time of the patron or client should always be our paramount responsibility and to achieve this, certain public relations strategies must come to play." Saving the time of the user is one of the laws of

librarianship as propounded by Ranganathan. The public services staff should be able to distinguish between professional search by the staff and naive and ill-equipped user wandering. Staff-assisted search is not spoon-feeding.

Ezeani (2004) posits that "certain attributes of the public services librarians go a long way in affecting the image of the library either positively or negatively." Ezeani further classifies some of the qualities they must possess under two subheadings: Behavioural characteristics and professional characteristics and skill. The behavioural characteristics include approachability, personal friendliness, and ability to communicate: must be a positive person, must have a neat and personable appearance, must be a sociable person, and must be a progressive not a conservative person.

The professional characteristics and skills include knowledge of resources and collection, knowledge of correct use of reference sources and tools, effectiveness in interviewing, ability to use all resources to solve problems, a logical thinking and fast question-answering mind; must be able to provide several strategies to patrons, and must possess special skill in assessing, interpreting and modifying public opinion.

iii. ICTs in Public Libraries:

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), apart from boosting access to information in public libraries, as well provide alternative sources where public library users can resort in order to cater for their information needs.

Utor (2008) observes that 'public libraries, in order to meet with the demands of the general public on daily basis must acquire adequate and up-to-date resources. They are also expected to improve on their routine services and at the same time embrace information and communication technologies.'

According to Gbaje (2007) "The desire for public libraries to have virtual libraries within their systems is no more hidden news. Because, while a traditional or conventional library's resources are limited, those of a virtual library are inexhaustible. A virtual library provides access to tools and quality-vetted e-resources."

According to the website www.rse.org/library/LICmember: 'a virtual library refers to a collection of full textbooks, journals, databases from different publishers and sources which can be accessed by members, users at any time from any Internet-connected computer, laptop or other portable devices.'

Thus, digitization the collection of the public libraries is not only necessary but expedient. According to Ikpahindi (2003) 'digitization is the process of translating a piece of information such as books, sound recordings, pictures and video into bits.'

A digital library like the virtual library is a library in which collections are stored in digital formats as opposed to print, microform, or other media, and are accessible by computers. Digitization and virtual library are necessary, especially now that the users have a great deal of options available to them other than the public libraries. Just a push on the relevant buttons on the cell-phone, one reads all the newspapers and current journals he wishes to read.

According to Betts (1990) '...the library ship and all who sail in it must be more aware of the rest of the fleet around it, the enemy submarines waiting to torpedo it, the reefs around the corner and the alternative means of travel that many passengers prefer. We may need a different kind of vessel altogether or we may want to sail it somewhere else.'

Public libraries must upgrade through digitization to remain relevant. They should be conscious of alternatives that keep emerging as the days go by. The age's destination is information and knowledge and everyone is looking for means of getting there. The public libraries should adopt the new technologies not only to build their image but also to empower their communities.

Correia (2002) opines that "...those people who currently have poor access to information will become further marginalized once basic computer and information literacy skills turn out to be more and more important for economic success and personal advancement."

The public library should not only be upgraded; the staff should be trained to face the challenges of the electronic revolution. This is the opinion of Akers, Martin and Summey (2000) when they say that 'the electronic revolution of the last decade has made a permanent impact upon the very nature of information itself. Static print resources have in many instances given way to evolving, digitalized data that can be retrieved and manipulated according to the user's information needs. In turn, librarians have faced similar evolution, from mediators of resources to facilitators of information into knowledge.'

Thus, librarians must be trained to face the challenges posed by the technological revolutions. They must be adequately equipped to undertake tasks involving the new media as they relate to their jobs. To experience satisfaction with their organizational relations, ICTs in public libraries serve as basic tools for

communication. They enable the library organizations to communicate effectively through instantaneous availability of data and information. They increase the ease and speed of communication. ICTs make for the efficiency of workplace; saving time and promoting productivity. They facilitate inter-library loan and help the libraries keep abreast of developments in librarianship and other related fields. With ICTs, bibliographical searches are enhanced. All these boost the image of the library organization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is a need for effective application of public relations techniques in building the image of public libraries. Public libraries should upgrade their services in line with the technological developments as they relate to libraries and communicate effectively with their publics. The absence of the above yields low image and attendant loss of the library's clientele to alternative sources to the library. The resources and services of public libraries should increase and improve alongside the population of the communities they serve. As the "memory of the society," public libraries, if ill-equipped would be less useful to the population they intend to serve. Thus, they should be adequately equipped and positioned to function efficiently and effectively. The responsibilities of public libraries are obviously enormous.

In view of the above findings of this study, the paper recommends as follows:

- Public libraries need to improve their services in line with the technological developments as they relate to them.
- They need to communicate effectively with their publics, sustaining user patronage, thereby building positive image.
- The government should make adequate provision towards funding of Public Libraries.
- There should be training and re-training of public libraries staff to enable them deliver their services effectively.

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