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Information Access for Rural Women in Nigeria

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Abstract

Adequate access and effective use of information is succinctly linked to sustainable development and empowerment of rural women. Analysis of the situation reveals that Nigerian rural women face marginalization as far as information access is concerned. This chapter identified some channels and preferred sources of information for the rural women with their inherent challenges. Some implications were also discussed ranging from exploitation and trafficking of women, inability to access and harness agriculture and health information, credit facilities and government programs. Some challenges of information provision to rural women as identified include lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy, culture, and religion. The study recommended some strategies for improvement as regards quality access to information: establishment of vibrant public libraries in rural areas, continuous research on information seeking behaviour of rural women, information repackaging, provision of adult educational centres. The chapter concluded that neglect of rural women can only portend danger

Chapter Preview

Introduction

Information is an important resource for empowerment and development. The right to be informed is the right of every citizen in a democratic dispensation. Right to information should be understood as the right to access and obtain any official information by the public. When citizens have access to information they are inclined to make invaluable decisions, hold informed opinions without interference and influence policies that affect the society. Nigeria has a written information policy covering rural communities. The Act makes adequate provision for the information needs of different categories of the citizens. (Enonche, 2012). The existence of Freedom of Information act or bill does not necessarily guarantee access. Basic infrastructure including internet connectivity and other information technology (IT) resources must be on ground to guarantee access. Information services in Africa and Nigeria in particular are focused on urban areas leading to neglect of the rural areas. According to Ifijeh, Iwu-james and Adebayo (2016), information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in Nigeria are limited to urban areas and at exorbitant rates, affordable by the middle and upper classes of society, making many of the rural and suburban areas unable to fully participate in the emerging information economy. Furthermore, the Guardian (2017) reveals that rural communities' are being left out of modern society and the 21st century economy. They have:

- Though there are about 90 million internet users in Nigeria, there is still a group of over 53 per cent of the citizens who are not connected to the internet especially in rural areas (The Guardian, 2017). Absence of technological infrastructure leads to marginalization and creates a digital divide (Idiegbeyan-Ose, Olalekan, Ilo & Odion, 2015).

Hilbert (2011) alarmingly posited that the widest gender digital divide is in Africa. Rural-urban divide poses a challenge in Nigeria just like every other country across the world. Quoting the World Bank, The Guardian (2017) reported that issues of gender-related digital divide form part of the major discourse of governance and state institutions but the required action is not displayed. Antonio and Tuffley (2014) opined that even though there appears to be arguments in disaggregating gender-specific information regarding access and use of the internet in developing nations, men undoubtedly have greater access to the internet than women.

In agreement with the above assertion, the British Council Gender in Nigeria Report (2012) submitted that majority of the women living in developing countries suffer more gender-related discrimination than their

counterparts in developed countries and have worse life chances compared to men and even their counterparts in other societies. Their findings reveal that they are more likely to face unemployment and have less educational opportunities. They are often trapped and stuck by traditional cultures and values that prefer to keep them in the background limiting their potential and denying them access to basic digital literacy skills.

The need for information access cannot be overemphasized. All types of research, be it medical, economic, political, educational, social, agricultural, medical, and a host of other scientific breakthroughs often disseminate their findings through various channels, but how much of this beneficial information will ever reach the rural women.

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Complete Chapter List

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Chapter 1

[Rural Aging, Demise of the Traditional Family and the Rise of New Family Structures in Rural Turkey: Evidences From the Province of Kayseri](#) (pages 1-21)

Ozan Hovardaoglu, Seda Calisir-Hovardaoglu

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[Biodiversity Conservation and Unmet Social and Health Needs in the Rural Communities of Niger State, Nigeria](#)(pages 22-40)

Lawal Musediq Olufemi, Irhue Young Kenneth

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Chapter 3

[SME Micro-Financing and Business Growth in Rural Nigeria](#) (pages 41-55)

Adedeji Oluwaseun Adewusi

[Sample PDF](#)

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Chapter 4

[Institutional Innovation for Urban Village Renewal in Mainland China](#) (pages 56-74)

Dinghuan Yuan, Yung Yau, Haijun Bao

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Chapter 5

[The Possibility of a Sustainable Rural Development by Husbanding Precious Resources](#) (pages 75-98)

Fariha Bibi

[Sample PDF](#)

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Chapter 6

[Socioeconomic Impact of Education on Agriculture](#) (pages 99-111)

Saiqa Yameen

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Chapter 7

[Information Access for Rural Women in Nigeria](#) (pages 112-131)

Juliana Iwu-James, Jerome Idiegbeyan-Ose, Goodluck Ifijeh, Chidi Segun-Adeniran, Ugwunwa Chinyere Esse

[Sample PDF](#)

Chapter 8	\$37.50
Role of Microfinance Banks in Provision of Credit for Poverty Reduction in Pakistan (pages 132-145)	
Kamran Raiysat, Humaira Younas	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 9	\$37.50
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Md. Nasir Uddin, Md. Musfikur Rahman, Mst. Maksuda Khatun	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 10	\$37.50
Prospects of Agricultural Education in Pakistan-Options and Challenges: Agriculture Education in Pakistan (pages 164-178)	
Saleem Ashraf, Zakaria Yousaf Hassan, Ijaz Ashraf, Gulfam Hassan, Hammad Raza	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 11	\$37.50
Researching Sustainable Rural Development With Location Quotient Method in Yozgat (2006-2016) (pages 179-207)	
Barış Ergen, Muhammed Özgür Oğuz	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 12	\$37.50
Integrating the Informal Sector for Improved Waste Management in Rural Communities (pages 208-224)	
Veronika Alhanaqtah	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 13	\$37.50
Impact of Water Availability on Rural Development in Nigeria (pages 225-234)	
Sinmi Abosedo	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 14	\$37.50
Water Resources Management for Sustainable Development: International Environmental Law Perspectives (pages 235-250)	
Md. Mahfuzar Rahman Chowdhury	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 15	\$37.50
Private Sector Development in Waste Management in Rural Areas (pages 251-270)	
Veronika Alhanaqtah, Omar Alhanaqtah, Antonina Pakhomova	
Sample PDF	
Chapter 16	\$37.50
Experiences and Challenges of the Chinese Rural Education Development in the Context of the Rapid Urbanization (pages 271-295)	
Chenbing Wu, Cong Lyu, Jiacheng Li	
Sample PDF	

Chapter 17 **\$37.50**
[Sustainable Rural Development](#) (pages 296-311)
Shereen Yunus Khan
[Sample PDF](#)

Chapter 18 **\$37.50**
[Rural Development as a Tool of Inclusive Growth Glimpses From India](#) (pages 312-320)
Ved Pal Singh
[Sample PDF](#)

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Chapter 20
[Global Economic Issues and Policies Impacting Rural Sociology \(Module ELT Approach\): Understanding the Role of Global Economy in Community Mobilization for Sustainable Growth](#) (pages 338-347)
Marites Maria Theresa Barit Galing-Argonza
[Sample PDF](#)