

Review

Information as an effective tool in rural development

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This paper examined(s) the role of information in rural development. Literatures from similar studies were reviewed. The paper discussed the attributes of information for rural development, information use in rural development were also discussed, such as information for political participation, cultural development and preservation of cultural heritage. The paper as well discussed information for economic development in the rural area. Based on the discussion, conclusion and recommendations were made.

Key words: Information, effective tool, rural development.

INTRODUCTION

The role of information in any society, community, or organization cannot be over-emphasized. Information is very important in all phases of life. Communication is the transfer of a message (personal knowledge) from one person the ("Source") to another ("the receiver") through a medium. The medium could be oral, written, or electronic. Recorded knowledge can be communicated at a distance in space and time. What is thus communicated is popularly referred to as "Information" "Information is knowledge communicated for useful purpose (Okwilagwe, 2007).

Information is very useful in decision making, its availability enables the individuals, groups or organisation to make rational decisions and reduce their level of uncertainty. Information generally can be categorized into hard and soft information (Popoola, 2007) "The former is obtained from research "while the "latter is casual" and so not too serious. In both cases information is of great value to the society. The purpose of this discussion is to look at the nature of information, attributes of information, use of information, information behaviour of the users in rural areas and how information can be effectively used as a tool for rural development.

THE NATURE OF INFORMATION

Information as a resource has been a topic of discussion

for academics and practitioners in various subjects, fields especially in the field of economics. Economists such as Machlup, Porat and Bell (1994) pioneered the ideas of information economy with information as the transforming resource for post industrial society. Authors such as Marchand and Horton (1986) pioneered the view of information as a corporate resource, which like other resources such as people, money, raw materials equipment and energy, should be managed to give a competitive edge. These authors have helped to develop both the idea of information as a resource and information resources management (Badendoch and scout, 1994). In the wake of information and communication technologies, Hawkins (1987) confirmed that information is a commodity and is a requirements for economic enhancement and development in rural communities.

ATTRIBUTES OF INFORMATION FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Burk and Horton (1988) felt that information should be seen as something tangible, physical and concrete, while view points from within the information profession emphasize the intangibility of information, counter argument from authors such as Vickers (1985), White (1985), Cleveland (1985), Boulding (1968), Repo (1986), Cronin and Gudrim (1986) showed that information differs from tangible things. In classifying resources needed for development. Boon (1992) distinguishes between material resources and know-how resources. Information together with data and knowledge, is listed as know how resources. There is also the viewpoint of Boulding (1968)

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that information should be seen as a dynamic resource, which constantly alters and extends the store of knowledge (Eaton and Bawden, 1991). (Shannon, 2001) (cited in Mark and Pierce, 2001:476) was probably the first to state that information can alleviate uncertainty – another intangible attribute.

The intangible attributes of information in rural development included the following.

i. Value of information: Unlike other tangible resources, information is most reality is quantifiable, that is, it is impossible to predict the ultimate value of information to its users especially the rural dwellers who are mainly farmers and artisans who needs vital information for their day to day activities that will lead to their rural community's development.

ii. Interdependence- As a result of the fact that information always form(s) part of technology that people needs for development (whether in form of a product or a process) it is evident that information as a product or process will not be well received by traditional societies (rural dwellers) when provided in isolation. Consequently, these people would be unable to add the information to existing knowledge. To solve this negative phenomenon among rural dwellers, prospective developers should not only provide technology, but also explain (provide information) by way of demonstrations, how to apply (use) technology and show them the benefit they will derive from such modern technology such as using fertilizers or practicing mechanized farming.

iii. Culture dependence_Shields and Servaes (1989) asserted that if information is transferred to a rural community with a different social background and environment, chances are that the information will not be understood in the way it was intended. The rural dwellers should be provided with information of related issues, such as reasons for using fertilizers and applying weed control, understanding financing for input resources and knowing about marketing places. The information provider should come to the level of cultural background of the rural dwellers before they can embrace the reformation message he/she has brought to them.

iv. Alleviation of uncertainty- According to Mark and Pierce (2001) they see information as the resolution of uncertainty. This is perhaps one of the intangible attributes best known among a variety of researchers. Farming (peasant) which is the major occupation of rural people is full of uncertainty, they are uncertain about the survival of their crops in the farm, fish in the fish pond or other agricultural products in the farmland, the information provider must be able to provide relevant information to the rural people which will help in alleviating their fear on the survival of their agricultural products.

v. Enhancement of economic growth Kaimowitz, Jack and Mathew (1990) stressed on the impact of new technology (including information as the hidden component) in agriculture on the basis of such aspects as in-

increased farm income, reduced risk, resource convention, improved health, better (food) security and overall economic growth.

vi Extension of the knowledge base:_ From a development point of view, there is more emphasis on improving peoples' lives socially and to improve a particular situation or specific circumstances in the rural areas. In this way, more value can be added to the appropriateness of information particularly in a situation where outside information from the industrialized world is used to improve a practice in rural development, the information content needs to be adapted to bring it to the level of understanding of potential recipients.

vii. Dynamics of information- Information cannot be regarded as a static resource to be accumulated and stored within the confines of a static system. It is a dynamic force for change to the system within which it operates. It adds value to an organization through encouraging innovation and change without being tangible (physically seen or handled). From the above, it is evident that information differs phenomenally from other resources needed for development in the rural areas – especially because it is intangible in nature. Although some of its attributes make it a suitable development resource (such as its ability to act as a dynamic force), others renders it less suitable (such as its inaccessibility owing to its dependency on culture and media).

INFORMATION USE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

It must be noted that attributes suitable for development may improve people's lives to such an extent that it is easy to see why information is regarded as a useful development resource, whereas attributes identified as less suitable for development can be regarded as limiting the usefulness of information. Because information is so crucial to almost all human activity, it seems obvious that developers would like to neutralize the negative impact in order to achieve their goals. So, to address the problem of information attributes less suitable for developmental purposes it would perhaps be worthwhile to take a closer look at the information behaviour of rural people used to the oral tradition. The reason behind this approach is that rural people who are used to the oral tradition have their own peculiar way of handing information that is closely related to their social and cultural background (Meyer, 2003).

Generally, poverty and lack of awareness of the modern farming techniques characterize the life style of people in the rural areas, majority of them are peasant farmers using some primitive tools which invariably yield low quantity of their agricultural products during harvest. As a result of these general problems of people in the rural areas, there is need for information experts to organize some training programmes for the set of rural dwellers so as to enhance their rural development and

boost their living standard.

Since most of the farmers cannot not read or write, the trainer (information expert) have to devise a training programme in which information regarding the basic principles of farming are conveyed to them in story form, with the aid of metaphors they could identify with, while necessary demonstrations and role-playing are to be incorporated into the programme. The farmers have to be introduced to additional information regarding soil preparation, weed and pest control, climatic conditions, how to arrange and care for tractors and other implements, how to arrange for seed, pesticides and bags for harvesting and how to go about borrowing money and paying back loans etc. If these are carefully implemented, they will lead to the rapid development of the rural area in the country.

Before we conclude this study, we shall look into the information behaviour in rural societies and we also suggest some solutions to the problems.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND VOTING

Information is very essential in the area of political participation and voting. When a community is politically empowered, they will have a better relationship with government and be able to attract development to their localities.

Lance Bennet and Micheal Xenos (2004) defined political participation to include voting, protesting, lobbying, trying to persuade others to vote and many other activities. They are of the view that if the youths are informed and actively participate in electoral processes, the society will experience great change but it has been found that local political parties are doing very little to attract young people into politics. Local political parties can make a big difference in getting young people involved in politics.

Donald P. Lireen and Alan Gerber (2003) are of the opinion that the old fashioned, door to door campaigning can be surprisingly effective and affordable tactics of mobilising youths for political participation. They also found out that phone canvassing increases turnout by 8.5 points and that canvassing young people also slightly increases turnout among adults living with them.

Information about laws regulating political participation should as of necessity be made available to the local populace, they should be informed on how to register, method of voting and be sensitised about the dangers of not participating in politics. Information should be disseminated in local languages in order to achieve results especially in localities where English language is not the medium of communication. It is a well known fact that once an individual has been motivated to get to the polls once, they are more likely to return. So, getting young people to participate in politics could be a key to raising a new generation of politicians and voters. Leaving young

voters off contact list because they are in rural areas is a costly mistake.

Bennet and Xenos (2004) has stated that one way to increase youth political participation and interest in politics may be through interactive technology by presenting campaign information in an interactive, entertaining manner and this is a sure way of increasing political interest, efficacy and participation.

The writers are of the opinion that these methods suggested above can effectively be used in our rural areas to politically develop them.

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

The importance of information in the cultural development of the rural areas cannot be over emphasized. The importation of the western culture has greatly affected our cultures. A lot of positive and negative changes have been observed in our local/ethnic communities. It was information that abolished the killing of twins babies, obnoxious widowhood rites and some other cultures that are repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience and against public policy.

Therefore the impact of information on people's culture is eminent as cultural resources management as key to development. Krydz lkwuemesi (2006) pointed out that poor funding and lack of adequate expertise have not allowed the museums and art councils to play their roles effectively but the inability of policy makers to fully appreciate the essence, values and potential of culture in a developing economy aggravates the problem. He is of the opinion that cultural sustainability and creation of cultural capital is very essential

CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

This can be defined as "the ability to retain cultural identity and to allow change to be guided in easy that are consistent with the cultural values of a people" (sustainable Development Research Institute, 1998:1) the concept is linked with social sustainability which Roseland et al. (2005:154) claims, enables the community to maintain and build on its own resources and have the resiliency to prevent and /or address problems in the future. This means that socially sustainable communities have the capacity to adapt to change and the challenge of development. It is also important to note that a society can only be sustained on its values and norms with some intake here and there from other cultures. But as civilisation runs its eternal course, traditions and cultural resources take new shape in their encounter and interaction with other realities. As the world becomes more sophisticated and complex, culture cannot make any significant progress unless it requires added value and meaning as intangible capital.

Ikwuemesis (2006) defined cultural capital as the economic value of cultural creativity and insists that the cultural principles of interrogational equity and diversity are fundamental principles governing cultural production in the context of the cultural economy. He posited that cultural economy can only be achieved if there is

(a) Communal respect of the history and character of those existing features that nurtures a sense of attachment to and familiarity with place. Special effort should be made to create and preserve places, rituals and events that foster greater attachment to the social fabric of the community.

(b) Policy makers must encourage a huge range of activities that give communities the opportunity to tell their stories, build their creative skills and be active participants in the development of their culture (O' hara, 2002:4).

(c) Milk and Brown (2004:6) states that it is important in all cases that the relationship between artists and their community becomes "a partnership rather than the expert sharing with the cultural amateur. It is through collaborative creative exploration of ideas and issues that social and development changes take place.

(d) Focusing on arts based solutions rather than on identifying problems and involving policymakers in community cultural development planning.

(e) Forming and maintaining new social networks with organisations, groups artists and government

(f) Integrating local customs, craft and practices into education s well as using arts and culture as a tool or regeneration and sustainability

(g) Supporting positive community, norms, such as cultural understanding and free expression and improving human capital, skills and creative ability in communities.

(h) Retaining and presenting heritage buildings while increasing opportunity for individuals to become more involved in the arts. Presenting cultural heritage site as a way of linking the past with the present and the future. Again preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage will ensure that tourism and regional economic development are sustained over long term, so that future generations may also benefit from them.

PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DEVELOPMENT

June Taboroff and Cynthin C. Look (1993) state that Africa's rich and varied cultural heritage finds expression in a wide variety of arts and crafts. Cultural property is preserved in pale ontological, archaeological, historical and sacred sites, as well as in museums, residence and the daily life of the people. African archcology traces the history of human evolution form its beginning, recording such significant cultural achievements as the development and use of tools, the independent invention of agri-

culture, long distance trade, fine arts as illustrated by early rock paintings, metalworking's and urban settlement. Contemporary architecture, paintings, sculptures, textiles and other cultural artefacts draw on a rich variety of traditions, many of which are still an integral part of daily life. Many other sites may be in existence unknown to the outside world and only environmental assessment and valuable information concerning these areas can bring sustainable development. Some of these sites can be turned into tourist centres that will yield money that will be used in developing these communities but of information is not available, no meaningful development can take place in such local communities.

To protect thee cultural heritage, making gazetting an explicitly legal requirement will help whether they are in private or public ownership. Another major problem today is finding the resources to enforce current legislation in the face of strong international demand for African At. Social and Economic incentives must be given to curb illicit traffic in antiquities. There should be a regulated expansion of urban and agricultural activities. Historic buildings should never be demolished. It is only as awareness grows of the value of cultural heritage to the society at large will protection, preservation and development become feasible.

Again laws to protect cultural property cannot be effective unless there is political will and public pressure to enforce them.

It is suggested that Universities play decisive role in disseminating, training and carrying out research on cultural heritage. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention has been ratified by 28 African countries and International assistance can be secured by governments to facilitate the protection of sites.

World Bank financed projects can help African countries to build capacity to manage cultural property in a sustainable manner and strengthen the base of local knowledge on cultural heritage issues.

Hawkes (2001) stressed the belief that the way a society governed itself cannot be fully democratic without there being avenues for the expression of community values and advocates the need to reintroduce the notion of cultural into the language of politicians and policy makers.

In effect, it is only through information that our cultural values can be preserved and passed on to the next generation.

Local Government Association, Cultural Services and the shared priorities London (2004) highlights the impact that cultural services have had across communities and how they have contributed to the multiple needs of commu-nities from inner city areas to the more remote com-nities.--- practical examples show that culture has impac-ted every area of local government and has improved service delivery and quality of life creating awareness amongst the local populace will help improve our cultures and the quality of life of the residents of local

communities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EMPOWERMENT

Availability of information on crop preservation available, markets for raw materials and the use of availability of loan bank facilities in obtaining loans in banks will help in the Economic development of the rural areas. Rural dwellers must be empower through information on what to do, how to do it and when to do it. The introduction of medium and small scale enterprises is also a step in the right direction towards the Economic empowerment Development in rural areas. Government should stop the importation of raw materials that can be produced locally.

Peter Onwualu (2008) stated that it was necessary to replace the raw materials imported into the country since there are abundant alternatives in Nigeria. Such raw materials that can be sourced locally include honey, dairy poultry, plantain, banana and meat. Major producers of these items in our localities should be identified and trained on ways to improve their yield and the quality thereof. Factors inhibiting optimal production should be identified and solved. He is of the opinion that this will reduce the drain on foreign reserve and the development of the Agricultural sector whether at the production, processing, distribution or utilisation levels will have an unquantifiable impact on the overall development of Nigeria. By doing this poverty, unemployment, poor health and their associated vices will be curbed. The implication of the above is that rural people need more information at the grass root on how to start and run a small scale business enterprise. In other to achieve the above, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (SMEDAN) was established to help in this particular area. Adelaja (2008) said that entrepreneurial education and training is very important for those into Small and Medium Scale Business. A man must have a passion for what he is doing for him to bring out his best. Setting up people with the right education and training is part of what makes a business profitable and sustainable. Education is very important because it provides the needed information which will helps the trainee to know their limits, capability, problems and solutions and this will in turn enhance their economic empowerment and development. Availability of information in respect of facilities (loan) to help small and medium scale business is a necessity as government are establishing micro-finance banks in the cities.

Micro finance banks should be established in more rural area Ogunseye (2007) believes that micro finance banks are expected to generally focus on small and medium scale enterprises which constitute the real engine of Economic growth in the rural areas. He urged that awareness on micro finance banks should be intensified by the media and interest on loans should not be draconic.

RURAL DWELLERS AND MARKET INFORMATION

Information on the availability of markets should be made accessible to the rural dwellers. When they get more involved in these economic processes, the nation will be better for it. To buttress the importance of accessibility of information Kpakol (2007) spoke about the newly introduced programme termed Village Economic Development Solutions (VEDS) which was introduced by (NAPEP) National Poverty Eradication Programme. This is to be launched soon in all the villages in Nigeria and it will help spur economic activities. The support will be in areas of micro credit and technical expertise. He advised that Nigerians should support village Economic growth by actively participating in the development of their villages. The tendency to migrate to urban areas may be a thing of the past if people are able to access information. In the case of marketing, traders will be able to access information about buying and selling so it is of paramount importance that services like internet are extended to rural areas (Nabwowe, 2009).

AGRICULTURE AND INFORMATION

Globalisation refers to increasing global connectivity, integration and interdependence in the economic, social, technological, political, ecological and cultural spares. This according to Wikipadia (2007) is the definition of globalisation. It is hanged on improved technologies and elimination of barriers to trade.

The World Bank (2007) enumerated some of the benefits of globalisation to include reduction in poverty, increase life expectancy, increase economic growth, improved living standard e.t.c. this testifies to the fact that globalisation affects different aspects of human activities.

In the world presently and especially in African and traditional societies, one major concern is the issue of food security.

According to food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO 1996), food security means that food is available at all times, the people have means of access to it, it is nutritionally adequate in terms of quality, quantity and variety and it is also acceptable within a given culture. Only when these conditions are in place can a population be said to be food secure.

For a Nation to achieve lasting self reliance at both national and household levels, the success initiative must be based on principles of economic viability, equity, broad participation and the sustainable use of natural resources (FAO 1996).

According to Aina (2007), there is a threat to food security in the world because of declining food productivity. He stated that food security is a major focus of globalisation and in order to provide for increased food productivity, globalisation promotes free liberalisation, which would ensure increased efficiency and improve the economic situation of farmers.

There are many problems and issues facing agriculture in Africa and they include:

- a. Agriculture in Africa is basically subsistence in nature. Farmers have small farms and produce food for their household and a little to sell.
- b. Agriculture is labour intensive in Africa. Farmers still use crude implement like hoes and cutlass. Technological advanced farming is almost non-existent as only a handful of Africa farmers are privileged to have modern implement for farming.
- c. There is the rural urban drift by the youth and only the aged are left to do farm work.
- d. Most African farmers are illiterate who can neither read nor write.
- e. Farmers in Africa cannot boast of basic infrastructures like electricity, potable water good road roads, telephones or any ICT technology.
- f. Dissemination of information on new systems and technologies in respect of farming is very low. Rural farmers depend largely on agriculture extension workers through one on one contacts for information on agriculture and due to the low numbers of these extension workers, it is hard for farmers to obtain new information.

The role of information centres

If African farmers would benefit from globalisation, there is need for the provision of regular information to farmers in a format that would be comprehensible to them. (Aina, 2007) considering the prevailing high rate of illiteracy, divergence in cultural practices and limited technology, information infrastructures in Africa is abysmal, thus farmers still grope in the dark when it comes to latest innovations in farming practices.

In this regard global information is very important. Griffith and Smith (1994) describe global information as a telecommunication infrastructure that links homes, business, school, hospitals, libraries to each other to the vast away of electronic information resources". In essence global information cannot be achieved in the absence of telecommunication infrastructures which constitute an important component of global information. Internet facilities in the rural areas are also too low and non-existent in some parts of Africa (internet world states root). Internet is a very fast mode of dissemination information and should be extended to the rural areas where a farmer resides. This can be achieved if rural telecommunication infrastructures are developed.

Information centres should be cited in rural areas with complete information and communication gadgets. Such equipment must include computers, internet access, local and wide areas networks, radio and television sets, telephone, video and audio recorders, libraries with skilled professionals and information scientist would be responsible for capturing information and sending same

to ministries of agriculture and other related organisations. These information can be repackaged in a form that would be useable to non literate and semi literate farmers.

These information centres would also require films, CDS, audio and video cassettes on how agriculture is practiced in other parts of the world. These information with time would be put into practice by these rural farmers.

Apart from information relating to agriculture the information centre should also provide general information on other areas of rural life.

PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR IN TRADITIONAL SOCIETIES/RECOMMENDATIONS

In an oral cultural background, information is stored in people's memories only. Therefore, people with good memories play a vital role in storing and transferring information and so the death of a knowledgeable person may lead to valuable information being lost. To address this problem, we suggest that information should be stored in books and non book materials such as audio visual materials like: audio cassette, video cassette, micro film, CD-ROM, Computer discs etc. These would preserve information for a very long period than people's memories.

The manner in which information is communicated is another problem. The rural societies make use of town crier to pass information to the people, this is quite inadequate as most people will not hear the message or they may not be around when the information is passed across by the town crier hence such message would not be effective. We suggest that the rural societies should make use of the modern methods of communication facilities like telephone to pass information to people in the society and this will facilitate rapid rural development.

In cultures with an oral tradition, information is exchanged face to face. Information cannot be transmitted over long distances. Often, information remains within the borders of a particular community, unless people of different communities interact, information created in other communities will remain uncommunicated. Also, to solve this problem, telephone and Electronic mail facilities could be used.

African government must take a deliberate action and embark on rural telecommunication development. Rural farmers should be trained on how to improve their yield. Information relating to new innovations must be made available to them. African farmers should be encouraged to embrace new technologies in farming.

Conclusion

It must be emphasized that establishing a relationship be-

tween the attributes of information and information behaviour of people which used to be transmitted through the oral traditions, would not be an easy task, it then becomes evident that certain information attributes may render information less useful for acceptance as a development resource. Again, due to the requirements of these rural communities as reflected in their information behaviour such as one on one communication technique it becomes clear why outside information has such a small chance of successfully crossing the boundaries between modern and traditional (rural) societies.

The above led to the idea that knowledge of both the nature of information and the information behaviour of the users in traditional societies could help develop appropriate communication mechanisms of outside information on the one hand and to avoid pit falls on the other

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