Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Article

Availability of Library and Information Services for Rural Community Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ewatto, in Esan South East LGA of Edo State

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Abstract

Objective – This paper examines the availability of Library and Information Services in a rural community using as a case study the community of Ewatto in Esan South East Local Government Area of Edo State in Nigeria

Methods – Questionnaires were distributed by hand in each of Ewatto's eighteen villages.

Results – The survey found that the information needs of Ewatto rural dwellers are in the areas of health, occupation, politics, as well as family and education. Their major sources of information include town criers, oral information from neighbours and newspapers. The major challenges hindering information availability include absence of libraries and information service centres, lack of internet connectivity and poor attitude of rural extension workers.

Conclusion – For any nation to develop maximally, rural communities must be provided with adequate, relevant, and up-to-date information, the authors recommend the establishment of a library and information centre in Ewatto.

Introduction

The difference between developed and developing nations is generally attributed to factors such as per capita income, literacy, and living standard (Saharil, 2015, Dufrenot, Mignon & Naccache, 2009). Good tax systems, good governance, and well-developed infrastructure are also associated with developed countries (Goodspeed, Martinez-Vazquez & Zhang, 2010).

Kamba (2009), however, asserts that *information* also contributes positively to the social, political, educational, and economic development of any community. It creates awareness among the members of that community. It is a resource that all individuals use to improve their wellbeing. Information enables individuals, societies, communities, and organisations to make rational decisions and reduce their level of uncertainty (Idiegbeyan-Ose & Akpoghome, 2009).

Ikhizama and Okojie (2001) observed that libraries are influential in the dissemination of information, especially in rural areas. This is particularly important in developing nations like Nigeria because the bulk of the nation's population dwells in the rural areas (Issa, Omopupa & Salman, 2012).

Unfortunately, research findings and observation reveal that establishments and agencies whose responsibilities it is to ensure information dissemination in Nigeria have an urban-biased orientation (Issa et al., 2012). Even though Obinyan, Obinyan and Aidenojie (2011) observed that rural dwellers can derive maximum benefits from the use of library resources and services, libraries and information centres are not commonly found in rural areas.

Social inequality is perpetuated when the rural population does not have access to up-to-date information (Issa et al., 2012). The information needs of rural dwellers include those of education, health, agriculture, employment, and transportation among others (Alegbeleye & Aina, 1985, Idiegbeyan-Ose & Akpoghome, 2009, Mtega & Ronald, 2013).

Literature Review

Agha and Akhtar (1992) characterise information as a strategic resource along with human, financial and natural resources while Onu (2005)

refers to information "as the oil that greases the wheel of governance programme and the activities of government and individuals" (p.85).

Popoola (2007) enumerates the five factors of production as: land, labour, capital, entrepreneurship, and information. He further stresses that for meaningful development to take place anywhere, adequate information must be provided. Berezi (1983 also calls information the fifth factor of production, saying it is essential for agricultural and rural development and that it is what brings about social and economic change. Achugbue and Anie (2011) observe that African countries have not devoted attention to providing their citizens with access to information, and especially not the rural dwellers who constitute a majority of the African population.

Opeke (2004) states that information is widely accepted as the essential feature of production, consumption, and exchange and that information empowers all citizens. Furthermore, information is needed for empowerment and decision making, and is necessary for development in rural communities (Unagha & Ibenne, 2011). Seneviratne (2007) suggests that rural communities need information for living and for participation in social activities.

Access to information is a basic right of citizens either in rural or urban areas. Nevertheless, Nigerian rural dwellers are sometimes perceived to be 'illiterates' who have nothing to contribute to the society. In 1987 Aboyade reported that some librarians believed that until urban dwellers with capacity to use library services had been adequately served, it would be "a misdirection of efforts to serve the illiterate rural dwellers" (p. 200).

In this globalised and information-driven society, information has become a necessity (Unagha & Ibenne, 2011). Harande (2009) points out that "any serious, active, conscious, sensitive government would not neglect rural communities in terms of provision of information" (p.1). He further observes that there is a significant relationship between slow or no development in African countries and neglect of the rural areas. In 1985 Alegbeleye and Aina stated that third world countries had come to realize that little meaningful development would take place unless the rural areas were provided with adequate and timely information. More recently, Harande (2009) observes that there are still inadequate information services in rural areas.

Statement of Problem

Rural dwellers cannot fulfill their potential and contribute to national development if they lack access to information.

The rural community of Ewatto has several public and private primary and secondary schools, yet one wonders if members of this community also have access to the information required for the improvement of their lives and for contributing to national development. It is against this background that the researchers decided to investigate library and information services in Ewatto community in Esan South East LGA (Local Government Area) of Edo State, Nigeria.

Aims

The general objective of this study is to examine information services in Ewatto.

The specific objectives are to

- ascertain the information needs of Ewatto community dwellers;
- find out the sources of information available for Ewatto community dwellers;
- investigate the availability of library and information services in Ewatto town;
- examine the challenges hindering information availability to Ewatto community dwellers.

The research questions are

- What are the information needs of Ewatto community dwellers?
- What are the sources of information available for Ewatto community dwellers?
- Are library and information services provided in Ewatto community?
- What are the challenges hindering information availability in Ewatto community?

Brief Description of Ewatto in Esan South East LGA of Edo State Nigeria

Ewatto is a community of eighteen villages located in Edo State in southern Nigeria. Elevated at 155 metres above sea level, it lies less than seven degrees north of the Equator. The land is agricultural. The Population Reference Bureau points out that "census taking in developing countries can be …difficult" (Lalasz, 2006), and one of the few available estimates of Ewatto's population places it at about 9600 (Lalasz, 2006).

Figure 1
Ewatto, Nigeria (Mapcarta, 2015).

Ubiaja is the nearest city, and is the location of the administrative headquarters of Esan South East Local Government Area as well as the location of the nearest public library. Ubiaja is about nineteen kilometres north of Ewatto.

While the population in Ewatto's eighteen villages engages in hunting, trading, traditional medicine, teaching, craft and health work, most people are farmers who produce crops such as yams, tomatoes, kola nuts and cassava.
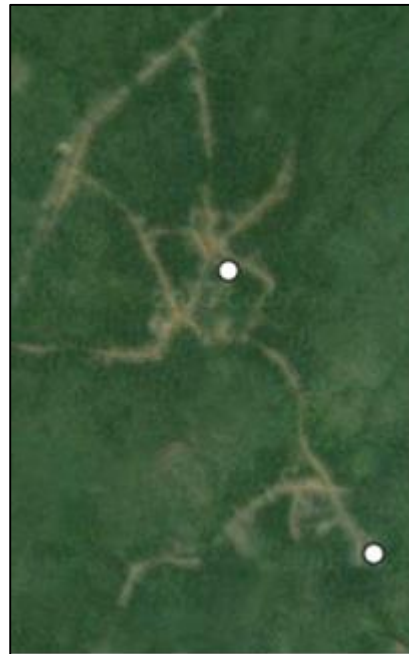

Figure 2
Satellite view of Ewatto's villages (Mapcarta, 2015).

There are village heads, or chiefs, in each of the eighteen villages. These chiefs are responsible to the *onojie* (literally, *king*: the administrative head of all the villages) who is, in turn, responsible to the Edo State Governor. Ewatto has three major markets, a central post office, and a police station. Cell phone service is available, but internet service is not.

Esan and English are the predominant languages. There are two secondary schools and eight primary schools founded by the state government, as well as private primary and

secondary schools. The literacy rate in Ewatto is high because almost all the young people have completed secondary school.

Methods

The survey method (a questionnaire) was adopted for collecting information in this study. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. The gender and age of the respondents is summarized in the charts below.

Development of Questionnaire

Survey taking is not a common experience in Ewatto. It was felt that some respondents would find it difficult to respond to open-ended questions, and others might not respond at all. Further, the entire questionnaire had to be interpreted for some respondents, and open-ended questions would have been especially difficult for them. Therefore, the authors decided not to use this type of question and, instead, provided a list of answer choices for individual questions. The answer choices were based on information needs and challenges of rural dwellers as suggested by the literature. With respect to question 6, for example, Kamba (2009) and Mtega and Ronald (2013) suggest that lack of a library and information centre is an impediment to information availability while Harande (2009), Zaid and Popoola (2010) and Mtega and Ronald (2013) mention lack of internet access as an impediment. Kamba (2009), Zaid and Popoola (2010) and Mtega and Ronald (2013) suggest that government insensitivity to rural information needs and insensitivity of rural information workers contribute as well.

An "others" option was provided in questions 3, 4, 5 and 6 in case respondents wished to articulate their own answers (none did).

Data Collection in Ewatto's villages

The researchers and research assistants used Okadas (the motorbikes ubiquitous in Nigeria) to get from one village to another over Ewatto's dirt roads. They walked around the villages distributing the questionnaires after 4pm when everyone was home from the work place or farm. Anyone could participate, and respondents included farmers, students, retired and active teachers, principals, headmasters, politicians and civil servants. On arriving in each home, researchers would observe cultural protocols such as making proper greetings, introducing themselves, and conversing about the purpose of the visit. They waited for respondents to fill in the questionnaires and collected them back. Farmers who could not read or write were assisted in completion of the questionnaires with the aid of local language interpreters. After the main exercise, the villagers would offer the visitors refreshments as the culture of Ewatto demands. Each visit could take up to an hour, or longer with non-literate respondents, because questions had to be interpreted for them in the Esan language. As a result of these conditions, the process of distributing and administering the questionnaires took about two years.

In all, fifteen questionnaires were distributed in each of Ewatto's eighteen villages. This gave a total of 270. Out of the 270 questionnaires distributed, 238 were returned of which 210 were properly completed and used for data analysis. This represents a 77.8% response rate.

Results

Items 1 and 2 on the questionnaire were used to collect data about gender and age.

In question 3, respondents were asked to indicate their information needs. Based on their responses, these needs are categorized broadly as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that health /family planning information is the most common information need of rural dwellers of Ewatto as indicated by 183 (87.1%) of the respondents. This is followed by occupational information as indicated by 177 (84.3%) of the total respondents. Information on

Table 1. Gender of Respondents

Gender of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	87	41.4
Female	123	58.6
Total	**210**	**100**

Table 2. Age of Respondents

Age of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
10-15 Years	13	6.2
16-20 Years	17	8.1
21-25 Years	33	15.7
26-30 Years	30	14.3
31-35 Years	23	11.0
36-40 Years	32	15.2
41 and above	62	29.5
Total	**210**	**100**

Table 3. Information Needs of Ewatto Community Dwellers

Category of Information Need	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Occupational information	177	84.3
Health information/ family planning	183	87.1
Information on education	89	42.4
Information on politics	122	58.1
Others (selected, but details not articulated).	66	31.4

politics and education were ranked third and fourth. The "others" choice, which ranked fifth, was selected by 66 respondents but none of these 66 responses indicated what was meant by "others." The responses are further depicted in Figure 3.

In question 4, respondents were asked to indicate the sources of information available to them in Ewatto. Their responses are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4 shows that the major means of getting information in Ewatto is through the town criers. Town criers are appointed by the chief and village elders who provide them with information. An example of the news they might announce is "The chief said medical officers are coming to our village tomorrow to immunize our children under five years old. You are expected to bring your children to the chief compound

tomorrow morning." Most town criers are men. They walk around the village using a gong to get people's attention before they give the information.

In this study, 196 respondents (constituting about 93.3% of the respondents) indicated that they get news from town criers. Another major source is oral information which is accounted for by 155 (73.8%) respondents. Newspaper, posters, magazines, and church bulletin attracted 112 (53.3%) respondents, while radio and television were identified by 56 (26.7%) respondents.

In question 5, respondents were asked if library and information services are provided anywhere in Ewatto community. The respondents categorically stated that there are no libraries and information services of any type provided in Ewatto community, including in any of the
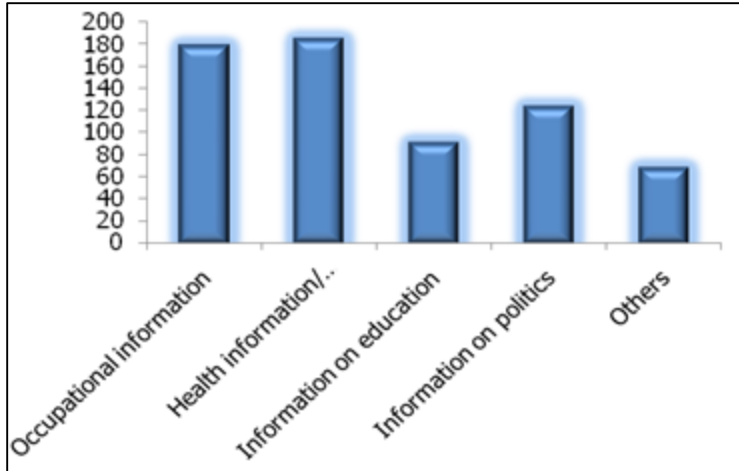
Figure 3. Information needs of Ewatto community dwellers.

Table 4. Sources of Information Available in Ewatto

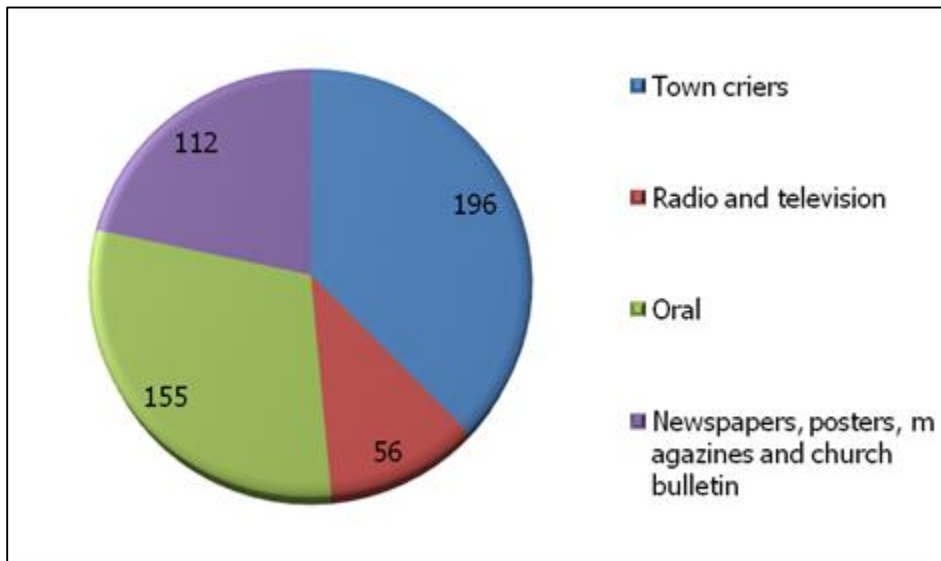| Sources of Information	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Town criers	196	93.3
Radio and television	56	26.7
Oral information through friends and neighbours	155	73.8
Newspapers, posters, magazines and church bulletin	112	53.3

Figure 4. Pie chart showing sources of information in Ewatto community.

primary and secondary schools owned by the community, state government, or individuals.

In question 6, respondents were asked to indicate one or more challenges hindering the availability of information in Ewatto community. Responses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 shows that 198 (94.3%) of the respondents stated that unavailability of library and information centres was the major barrier to information availability in Ewatto. Lack of internet connectivity is another challenge as indicated by 148 (70.5%) respondents. Insensitivity of the government to rural information needs is further challenge as shown by 134 (60.8%) rural respondents. Finally, 112 (53.3%) respondents indicated that lack of information is due to poor attitude of rural information extension workers.[1] An "others" option was provided for this question, but was not selected by any of the respondents.

Discussion

This study shows that rural dwellers in Ewatto community have various information needs ranging from occupational to health, political, recreation, family planning, and retirement. This is consistent with the findings of Mtega and Ronald (2013), and Seneviratne (2007), who stressed that communities need information in the areas of health, education, agriculture, politics and occupation.

The main source of information for Ewatto rural dwellers is the town crier.

The study points to lack of a library and information centre, lack of internet connectivity and insensitivity of the government to rural information needs as impediments to information availability. This finding is consistent with Mtega and Ronald (2013) who listed lack of internet, lack of electricity, outdated information sources, and lack of government interest among the challenges of rural dwellers in being able to access information.

A library and information centre, including internet connectivity, would seem a likely remedy to these problems.

Table 5. Challenges of information availability in Ewatto Community

Challenges	Number of responses	Percentage (%)
Unavailability of library and information centres	198	94.3
Lack of internet connectivity	148	70.5
Insensitivity of the government to rural information needs	134	60.8
Poor attitude of rural information extension workers	112	53.3
Others	0	0

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[1] Rural extension workers are government officers in different sectors, such as agriculture, health, and education. They serve as intermediaries between the government and the rural dwellers in their day-to-day activities. Their responsibility is to liaise with the rural dwellers and find out their challenges and then to communicate these issues to the appropriate government agency for a solution.
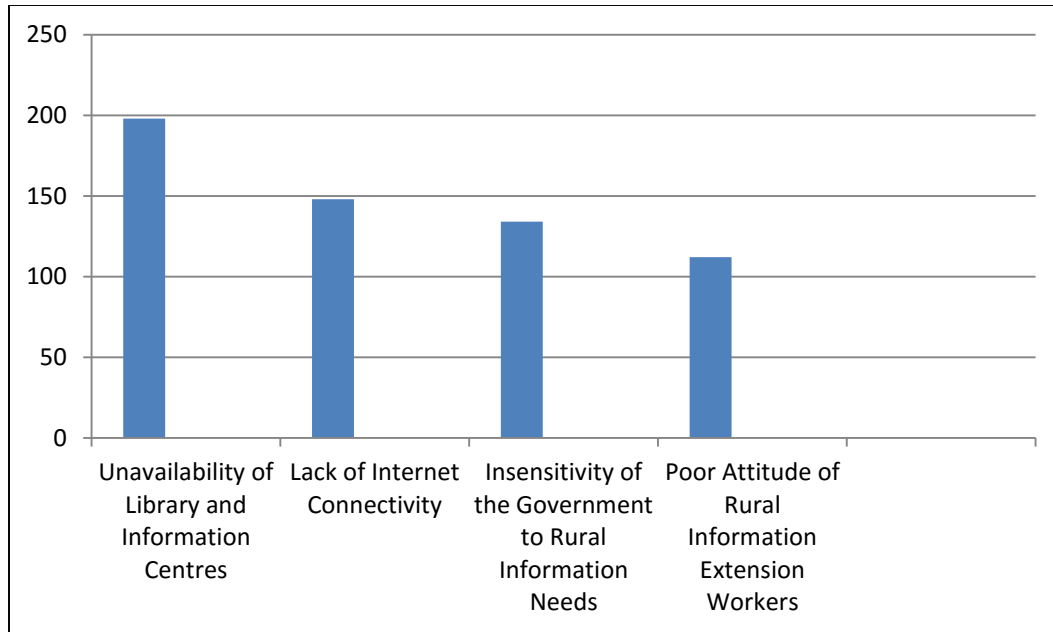
Figure 5. Bar chart showing challenges of information availability in Ewatto.

In their study of public libraries in Edo State, Obinyan, et al. (2011) pointed out that public libraries are "hardly used and when they are used, the majority of users are pupils who use them as reading rooms" (p. 4). Obinyan et al. indicated that this low usage happened because the information needs of the local population were not investigated beforehand so as to know the right materials and services to be provided. The outcome was that the libraries (all of which lacked internet access) were of little relevance to potential users. Why would the outcome in Ewatto be different? One of the main purposes of this study was to discover the specific information needs of the Ewatto community. A library based on the known information needs of the community could provide relevant materials in various formats including print, audio, and video. The library could also provide translation and information repackaging services for non-literate users**.** These materials could include information in the local dialect in the form of posters and other pictorial formats, drama, songs, and so on. User education programmes would be of key importance and could be supported by the village heads of Ewatto, whose words are highly respected. The village heads could also direct the town criers to remind villagers of the need to use the library and announce special events such as programmes to teach farmers how to increase crop yield, pregnancy management for expectant mothers, etc. Such a library could maintain a high level of patronage and remain relevant by considering and meeting the information needs of the entire Ewatto community.

Conclusion

Information plays a vital role in the progress of any nation and Nigeria is no exception. It is the responsibility of federal, state, and local government to provide adequate, relevant, and timely information, especially to the rural dwellers who make up the majority of Nigeria's population.

Research cited in this study has shown that rural dwellers can derive maximum benefits from information services available in library and information centres. In the community of Ewatto, however, there is no library and information centre, not even in any of the government-run or privately-owned schools, thus limiting the community's access to needed information.

Although public libraries in Africa are often underused, this study suggests that a library based on the known information needs of the community could employ existing cultural avenues of support and maintain high patronage and relevance to the community. Therefore, the following recommendations are made:

1. Solicit support and funding from those government ministries whose responsibility it is to provide internet and information services to rural dwellers, with the goal of creating and maintaining a library and information centre in Ewatto.
2. Also solicit private support and funding to create and help maintain the library.
3. Select library materials and offer user education programmes based upon the specific information needs of the community.
4. Provide specialized materials and services to meet the needs of non-literate residents.
5. Use existing cultural avenues (influential role of village heads, services of town criers, etc.) to create awareness, promote library use and attendance at education programmes, and, in general, help ensure that the library maintains its relevance to the community.

It is expected that a library based on this model could lead to numerous individual life improvements and more community participation in national development.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire on Availability of Library and Information Services for Rural Community Development in Nigeria: A Case Study of Ewatto, in Esan South East LGA of Edo State.

Please provide answers to the questions. The information is for research purpose.

Thank you.

1. Sex Male ( ) Female ( )

2. Age 10-15 Years (   ) 16-20 years (   ) 21-25 years (   ) 26-30 years ( ) 31-35 years ( ) 36-40 ( ) 41 and above ( )

3. What is your information need? Please tick the options that are applicable to you.

Information needs	
Occupational information	
Health/family information	
Information on education	
Information on politics	
Others	

4. What are the sources of your information? Please tick the options that are applicable to you.

Sources of information	
Town Criers	
Radio and Television	
Oral Information through friends and neighbor	
Newspapers, Posters, Magazines and Church Bulletin	
Others	

5. Is there any library and information centre in Ewatto? Yes ( ) No ( )

6. What are the challenges of information availability in Ewatto? Please tick the options that are applicable to you.

Challenges to information availability	
Unavailability of library and information centre	
Lack of internet connectivity	
Insensitivity of the government to rural information needs	
Poor attitude of rural information extension workers	
Others	