BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TOWN AND GOWN THROUGH INFORMATION REPACKAGING: THE ROLE OF CENTRE FOR LEARNING RESOURCES, COVENANT UNIVERSITY, OTA, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Communities which host universities are supposed to have an edge over their counterparts in various areas of development. Covenant University has made outstanding contributions towards the development of its host community, Ota. This has invariably helped in building a solid relationship between the university and the community. This paper examines the role that the university library can play towards the development of the host community. It focuses on repackaging of the avalanche of information resources into formats that can be easily accessed by members of the rural community. Information can be repackaged in form of songs, drama, stories; audiovisuals etc. This will help to conquer the barriers of language, time and distance which constitutes accessibility bottlenecks to the illiterate members of the host community. The study concludes that university libraries must take positive steps towards addressing the information needs of their host communities and ensure that information is made accessible to them, irrespective of their educational and social backgrounds.

Keywords

Information Repackaging, University Libraries, Covenant University, Town and Gown

Introduction

Communities which host universities are adjudged to be more privileged than others. Such communities stand out to benefit both in terms of social amenities and in other spheres of life. Universities are expected to play a leading role in bridging the gap between 'the town and gown'. The best way of preserving the relationship between the town and gown is through touching the educational and social life, including the physical environment of the host community. Ali (2010) posits that it will prove vital for every single member of the community to have the opportunity to seek education and gainful employment just as it is important to ensure that the community has access to basic social needs like housing, healthcare and

nutrition. Ali further noted that the university helps talented members of the university community to gain advanced training and develop human capital into national resource. Covenant University has played tremendous roles in this regard. The mission based university which is poised to raising a new generation of leaders has been committed to the development of its host community and its environs by engaging in various activities towards community development

Covenant University has distinguished itself through various areas towards the development of its host community. Paramount among these are:
- environmental sanitation and beautification
- entrepreneural skills development
- sinking of boreholes in Ota community market
- donation of computers and books to host community and neighbouring secondary schools namely Iju Ebiye and Iganmode secondary schools
- free health services to the rural inhabitants of Iyesi Ota as part of World health Day (Covenant University, 2012)

Apart from the various contributions made by the university towards various aspects of development, the library has specific role to play in bridging the gap between the university and the community through the provision of information. The library which acquires, processes and preserves various information sources can repackage and make same accessible to Ota rural dwellers in a bid to improve their lives. Kularatne (1991) opines that information is a fundamental resource for development but however lamented that even when necessary information is available, not everyone benefits from it. The rural inhabitants of Ota require information on health, agriculture, management of finance, harmful traditional practices, savings and loans, management of HIV/AIDS etc. Research has also shown that some of the indigenes lack exposure to information needed to enjoy better standards of living. Ilo and Adeyemi (2010) in their study on HIV/AIDS information awareness among market women in Sango Ota discovered some challenges prohibiting Ota rural women from accessing information. Their major barriers include illiteracy, unavailability of resources, inability to understand the language of source and insufficient time. Library resources can be repackaged in simple formats and in local dialects for the purpose of understanding. To add value to a product, the information provider must understand the types of information access problems most frequently encountered (Quantum Dialog, 2004). The librarian's best approach towards this regard is to ensure that information is repackaged in formats and language which these groups of users are familiar with. The librarian should as a matter of fact not only repackage relevant resources but also help in making same available to since most of the natives lack the time and the skill to access the library. Monageng (1987) asserts that information must be interpreted and converted into a form that the user can understand and assimilate. Information hunger according to Harande (2009) is biting hard on our rural communities, and results in poor living conditions, illiteracy and poverty. Repackaging will therefore go a long way towards ensuring that Ota rural community benefits in the area of information as they do in other areas of social and environmental needs.

132

Covenant University Library Resources

Covenant University is a product of the Liberation Mandate Commission that God gave to Bishop David Oyedepo, the Chancellor of the university and Presiding Bishop of the Living Faith Church worldwide. It was established in 2002. It is a christian mission university committed to raising a new generation of leaders for the continent of Africa. The university's mandate is to revolutionize the educational landscape of Africa.

The University library, popularly known as Centre for Learning Resources is the hub around which all academic and other research activities revolve. Apart from the staff and students of the University who benefit extensively from the library resources, services are also rendered to researchers and other external patrons, including students from other universities. Library routine activities are carried out, using Millennium, a web based software used in most world renowned university libraries. The software makes it possible for the library's holdings to be accessed via the internet from any part of the world. Resources are acquired for all programmes offered in the university. Most of these materials are relevant to the daily information needs of the host community. They include materials on accounting, banking and finance, business studies, economics, languages, sociology. Others spread across Science and Technology as well as leadership and spirituality. The relevance of these sources to the needs of the host community cannot be overemphasized. The challenge however lies in the location, language, format and time required for the rural community to access the library resources. The inter-dependence between universities and their host communities brings changes in diverse forms. Ali (2010) opines that higher education institutions and communities must work together to create, mobilize and apply knowledge that is needed in the management and creation of sustainable development initiatives. Universities should be concerned about their host communities and contribute to their betterment

Information and Community Development

Information is a material for development for both urban and rural dwellers (Harande, 2009). Mansoor and Kamba (2010) observed that rural communities are left out of the existing information flow. Harande (2009) observed that 75 to 80 percent of the people in developing countries live in the rural areas and need positive, relevant and prompt attention in their daily activities. Libraries exist to serve as many people as possible (Iwhiwhu, 2008). These services are geared towards literates and illiterates alike. Asamoah-Hassan (1997) noted that the library is portrayed as a vehicle for educating, informing and enlightening. To have a balance in the development process of any nation, timely access to relevant information by both the rural and urban populace is imperative. This however is not the case as Diso (2005) observed that rural communities in Nigeria constitute the majority in terms of population, but are the most neglected in information policy implementation. This may be adduced to the fact that most rural dwellers are not literate in English language, and as such to make information readily available and accessible to such groups, the urgent need for information repackaging becomes essential.

Information Repackaging for Rural Dwellers

Ejiogu (2009) maintains that information repackaging is the translation of information in the language of a people, adopting the right medium familiar to them and providing the right environment that would generate the required interest from the targeted group. He further noted that adopting the techniques of information repackaging would assist in redesigning the information meant to address the needs of people especially the rural dwellers. This according to him may involve the transformation of printed information into oral form using community information centres, community based organizations, radio jingles, television programmes and focal group discussion. Information repackaging is neceessary for several reasons. Repackaging of information takes different forms. According to Iwhiwhu (2008), it can be by reformatting and synthesizing raw information, providing training or assistance to a user in accessing an information product, and combining expertise or consulting on a subject with access to relevant information sources. On the other hand, Rosenberg (1987) mentioned drama, story telling and use of songs as some forms of repackaging, while Boadi (1987) listed abstracting and indexing, selective dissemination of information (SDI), translation services, bibliographies, special bulletins and current awareness services. Sturges and Chinsen (1996) also suggested some information formats which include drama, use of songs, storytelling, audio visual materials, translation, oral transmission, group discussion and poetry. In repackaging information, certain requirements are expected to be met. Sturges and Chinsen highlighted some of them to include:

- the materials should be collected and organized efficiently
- there should be the capacity to analyze their contents and create new information packages from them and
- the new products should be disseminated freely

Information Needs of Ota Rural Community

Ota is one of the major towns in Ado-Odo Ota Local Government Area of Ogun State Nigeria. It is a fast developing community and boasts of large concentration of industries. This plays a major role in the involvement of the citizens in the sale and distribution of goods. Ota is also an agrarian community, which produces such crops as cassava, vegetables, palm oil, kolanut, plantain, maize among etc. Minerals like silica sand, gypsum, kaolin and glass sand exist in Ota. The town goes down in the annals of history as being the custodian of the vicarage of St James Anglican church which posits as the oldest story building in West Africa. It dates back to 1942. Farming and trading the major sources of livelihood of the inhabitants. To be able to excel in their trade and improve their standard of living, they need information. Apart from information required in farming and the distribution of proceeds, they need information to sustain their families and for peaceful co-existence. Their major information needs include farming methods, healthcare, finance management, harmful traditional practices, management of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as means of transporting their crops for sale.

Repackaging Covenant University Library Resources for Ota Community

Availability and accessibility of information to meet various needs has remained the rural dwellers' nightmare. Some of the problems discovered by Ilo and Adeyemi (2010) in their research on HIV/AIDS information awareness among rural women in Sango Ota market ranges from non availability of materials to illiteracy which results in their inability to access the format and language of the source and lack of time. It therefore behooves the librarians to quench the information thirst of the rural community by working on the available library resources and transforming them into formats that would be beneficial to the people. Aboyade (1987) avers that librarians are expected to repackage information materials which have been tailored to meet the information needs of rural inhabitants in a language and format that they would understand. Covenant University library resources can therefore be repackaged into the following formats:

Visual materials: The essence of this is to repackage various library information resources into forms that can easily capture their eyes, convey required information in an understandable language and also create lasting impression in their minds eye. Original source, be it newspaper, book, CD, or internet resources should first be translated to Ota native language before being transformed into posters, billboards, pictures to be mounted at strategic places like markets, health centres, churches, village squares etc. The use of slides graphics, photos and charts will help the rural inhabitants to have a better understanding of the content of information resources. Aina (2006) noted that information to be repackaged could be sourced from published materials, raw data collected by research institutes, government statistical service and even people's own corpus of indigenous knowledge. Colourful billboards and posters attract peoples' attention to required information. This method will be impactful in disseminating information on HIV/AIDS, modern method of farming, dangers of careless incision and tribal marks, storage facilities etc. Information presented in visual forms will surely promote attentiveness and help maintain focus on the message of the source.

Use of songs: Rural dwellers enjoy singing and dancing and often use it to entertain themselves especially during festivities. Different age grades learn and master local songs. Songs are used to convey information on societal norms. Songs often go with dances and can also be used to criticize societal ills. Most of these songs are in the local dialects. Librarians can therefore repackage some vital information from books, newspapers, CD ROMs and internet into songs. Information that can appropriately be repackaged into songs include; harmful widowhood practices, damaging effects of female genital mutilation, benefits of family planning, mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS, evil effects of stigmatization, healthcare practices etc. Librarians can convert some of these practices and their evil effects contained in books, internet, and newspapers into songs. Songs convey important messages to the singers and the listeners alike.

Drama: Information contained in some books, magazines, projects which have relevance to their needs can be repacked in form of drama. The librarian should be involved in driving it

home to ensure that characters who can act well are selected for unique actions. Suitable costume will also help in driving the message home. After repackaging, the librarian should ensure that they practice and perfect the different actions required in conveying information to the indigenes. During the acting, the traditional rulers and village heads should be informed so that they can plan and gather the villagers in their halls or village square for this information dissemination activity. Information suitable for transmission through this method includes traffic rules, family keeping, child care and health care, farming methods, first aid treatment. Drama is better acted in their local language so that even the commonest villager will benefit from the information. Ali (2010) observed that by unlocking the community's potentials, universities help knowledgeable and talented people to gain advanced training

Selective dissemination of information: This is one of the important services rendered to Covenant University faculty who often forward their requests to the reference librarian. Whenever resources are available in such areas of request, the librarian communicates the Faculty by sending alerts through their mail boxes. This service can also be extended to the members of the community. In this case, the librarians can interact with the community leader in order to find out their information needs. On arrival, these resources should be repackaged and sent to the relevant areas where they are needed.

Story: Rural settings are characterized by dwellers who gather in families after meals and in village squares and town halls to tell stories and share experiences after the days work. Librarians can repackage relevant information for Ota rural dwellers and then make it available to them through stories. Information on 'how to do it' from manuals, books on sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and other formats on health issues can be repackaged as stories. Questions should be asked in between stories so as to draw their attention to important aspects of the information being conveyed. Librarians can also train members of the community and use them as resource persons. Important information packaged as story can be used to communicate several kinds of ideas to rural inhabitants.

Audio Visual Materials: Presentations can be enhanced through videos. Architectural designs, entrepreneural skill acquisition for making of hats, weaving, designing, welding, engineering works etc can be impacted through audiovisuals like videos and as television programmes. Relevant information which appears in books, projects, magazines and newspaper can also be repackaged into VCDs for their understanding. Copies can be given to families that have televisions while special arrangement is made with the village leaders for librarians to visit and educate them using the audio visuals. Presentations generated from the computer and relevant to their need can also be presented as audiovisuals. However, it is important to package all the information in local dialects since language of source constitutes a challenge to the rural dwellers.

Translation: This is one of the most important ways in which information should be repackaged for Ota community. Ilo and Adeyemi (2010) discovered that language is one of the major setbacks towards information accessibility. It is necessary to translate information

sources to Yoruba language, irrespective of the language and format of the original source. In this case, information in foreign languages like English, French and other Nigerian languages should be translated to Yoruba and possibly into Ota dialect. This will be of help in passing the information across to the rural community. It is necessary to ensure that the translation is done according to context in order not to distort the original message of the source.

Conclusion and Recommendation

It is important for universities to address issues bordering on the communities where they exist. All avenues should as a matter of fact be implored to ensure that viable projects are put in place towards the development of the various communities that play host to them. This will surely act as a bridge to the wide gap which exists between the town and gown. This study therefore recommends that libraries try to understand the need for impacting their host communities. They should therefore engage in the provision of information through repackaging, with special considerations to the peculiar needs of their host communities. Libraries should see the provision of information resources to their host communities as a corporate social responsibility and must ensure that it is given an important place in the scheme of things.

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