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RURAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION AS A PANACEA FOR NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Access to Information is a veritable tool for the advancement of any given society. The growth and development of a country are determined mainly by the country's capacity to acquire and make use of relevant information. A country like Nigeria can quickly attain development if rural communities are adequately informed about the happening in their environment. A large number of Nigeria populace lives in rural areas, and the circumstances have denied them the vast human and natural endowment of the country. This situation could be as a result of inadequate information services in the local settings. Thus, the main aim of this paper is to examine how pertinent information in rural communities can bring about sustainable development in Nigeria. Communication goal theory was adopted to explain this phenomenon. Data confirmed the deplorable condition of the rural dwellers in Nigeria and therefore the paper recommends that, credence must be given to information services in the countryside to reduce social menaces such as crime, environmental pollution, traffic and accommodation congestion, rural-urban movement, anxiety in the country and underdevelopment when compared with first world countries. And concerted efforts must be made to give access to information and knowledge by the teeming illiterates who constitutes the mainstream of rural inhabitants.

Keywords: Information; Nigeria; Rural Areas; Sustainable development

Introduction

Development of any nation according to Boon (1992) and Camble (1994) depends very much on the level of information, collective efforts of the people directly from the grass root. History has shown that rural communities in Nigeria have suffered from enjoying sustainable development largely because of lack of policy implementation. The consequence of this negligence resulted in rural communities lacking access to basic needs like information, water, food, electricity, health care, education and sanitation among others; these factors could lead to low life expectancy and high infant mortality rate. These human-made problems result to massive migration into urban areas to look for greener pasture and often in search of white collar jobs (Salisu, 2013). Therefore, creating awareness about necessities through the provision of information services to the rural dwellers becomes an essential component for sustainable development.

According to Manzvanzvike (1993) and Rosenberg (1993) the realization of any development program in the rural dweller's is mainly based on the sound knowledge and information in their day to day activities. An information system is multifacet and serves as a compulsory thread among various people of local inhabitants. The life of Nigerian

rural dwellers, as well as other developing countries, is pitiable regarding the level of abject poverty and other miserable conditions. Owing to the absence of infrastructural facilities that can make life endurable, local inhabitants result to "rural-urban drift" as the only way or solution to their terrible plight. Ezeah (2005) observed that the influx of rural-urban movement had occasioned a lot of political, social and economic constraints in both rural and urban areas.

Issa (1998) noted that despite different government developmental plans cum policies for the people in the countryside, the Nigerian rural dwellers are yet to see the impact of these policies as most of the local settings are still confronted with various deplorable conditions. Ranging from low productivity, social and economic backwardness due to lack of knowledge which is the direct implication of inadequate information in the countryside. Abah (2010) remarked that the terrible situation of the Nigerian rural sector is endemic and more appalling that even the few policies and schemes designed and implemented by the state over the years have not led to any meaningful development of the rural areas in Nigeria. It may give rise due to inadequate information about the said policies and programs. Ibrahim (1986) posits that after the independence of most African state, that information has been the source of power by some progressive African leaders to mobilize their societies to norms, attitudes, and traditions well-suited with Africa's needs". Arising from the above, it is palpable that Nigerian rural communities can equally be changed into conscious information environment that will lead to their development.

Any nation especially in the developing countries that toys with rural development and empowerment is toying with meaningful and significant development. As part of the requirement needed to enhance advancement in the rural communities is the provision of relevant knowledge as a tool of empowerment to take important decisions. Lack of information is one of the characteristics of Nigerian rural communities, which has led to high level of illiteracy, abject poverty, and poor living conditions. Diso (1994) observed that the literacy level in Nigeria is about 35-40 percent especially in the cities or urban areas. He, however, posits that the percentage is much lower in the countryside. He further maintained that insufficient learning facility which includes modern textbooks, journals, and other essential materials in various schools in the rural areas are responsible for the acute condition of the information services in Nigeria rural communities. He concluded that the teeming populations of the local communities are not provided with the relevant information, and that constitutes the essential factor for their underdevelopment.

In a similar vein, Kamba (2009) affirmed the above claim, when he averred that inadequate information at the appropriate time to the rural inhabitants weakens the determinations to improving the living conditions of the local people by both public and private agencies. Borchardt (1977) also acknowledged the imperative of information services to rural dwellers. When he remarked that none of the various policies and projects in the developing countries could be implemented meaningfully without the establishment of a literate and proficient society. And a scheme for the continuous provision of exchange of ideas, thought, and knowledge with which the community can feed and use with suitable amendments to construct own ethnic and industrial destiny".

Conceptual Framework

Information comes in diverse ways and is communicated in various forms. Information can be of any kind within the context of individual circumstances. This attests that, as a resource, information is unlike other resources. Rogers (1992) considered information as a vibrant force, unceasingly altering and increasing a reservoir of knowledge relates to circumstances. He went further that information modifies the understanding of non-literate groups in the society of particular practices which in turn can assist them in solving their common problems as well as improving their living conditions.

Okiy (2003) noted that "Rural development in Nigeria is a basis for economic development, and the information is an essential ingredient in the development process. Furthermore, Diso (1994) observed that" information must as a matter of urgency, be realized as a rudimentary factor for change if a robust and sustainable development is to be provided for.

According to Salisu (2007), he claimed that availability and accessibility of information to both rural and urban areas is clearly specified in development plans. But government propaganda and implementation are insufficient.

Sustainable National Development

The concepts of sustainable development is one of the recent terms that appeared in the literature and thinking of development policy. According to Kempe (1996) the phenomenon called sustainable development was first used by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report. The report defined the concepts as human advancement that take into cognizance the aspirations of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their desires (Ugwu and Ijah 2011). Oyebanji & Adekola (2008) conceived the concept as preservation, conservation, habit and effective management of resources in a way that the utilization of of resources by present generation would not hamper the future use of such remedies and enhancement in the quality of life for all the people.

Development from the perspective of Todaro and Smith (2009) and Sen (1999) is the general enhancement that translates to a conducive environment for every member of the society. The development could be defined as the advancement in all spheres of life (economic, social, cultural, political and environmental). It could be seen as an enhancement of essential societal needs, which includes health care system, education, housing, clothing, safety, and other aspects that can engender overall well-being of the people. The primary purpose of national development is to free peoples from the abject of poverty. Nyerere (1967) once remarked that everything about development revolves around human being. Aggarwal (2008) national development connotes all facets of human life, which consists of norms, belief, moral, emotional, political, social, economic, intellectual, and every other thing that has to do with man and his environment. As observed by Agboeze (2011) national development transcend beyond the economic aspect of life, despite economic factor is very germane for any nation. That while considering development that other factors like politics, social, physical, spiritual, freedom, dignity, culture, and among other things must be emphasized. National development directly implies the capacity of any country to achieve a better life for its

citizenry both now and in the future. Abraham (2012) however defined national sustainable development as any ability of a particular nation to attain wide-ranging improvements or advancement in all spheres of life. According to Bassey, Ekpah & Edeth (2008) cited in Abraham (2012) the phenomenon called sustainable development can be perceived from three perspectives: environmental sustainability, socio-political sustainability, and economic sustainability. They remarked that environmental sustainability is the practice of ensuring that the present processes of dealings with the ecosystem are pursued with the idea of keeping the surroundings as a perfect as naturally possible on ideal-seeking behavior. Bassey, Ekpah & Edeth equally maintained that socio-political sustainability emphasizes the desires for stable social and political system. It stresses the need to preserve and promote the social standards and political stability while economic sustainability apparently recognizes integration, participation and information as fundamental building blocks to support countries achieve development which acknowledges these independent pillars. They underscores that in sustainable development, everyone is a consumer and producer of information. They equally emphasizes the desire for improvement from traditional ways of carrying out business to modern methods that involve cross-sectional coordination and the integration of empowerment and social concerns into all development process.

Information Needs of Rural Dwellers

Efforts must be made to move rural development from little agricultural development projects to the provision of essential rural needs like information about their health and medical facilities, transportation system, electricity generation, irrigation program, among many others. The different nature of local environments shows that their information needs are numerous and multifaceted. In Nigeria, there are no details on the information requirements of rural dwellers. Ogunshye cited in Alegbeleye and Aina (1985) classified information needs of Nigerian countrysides into the following groups:

- The neighborhood:- information requirements in the community consist of pipe borne water problems, road, environmental hygiene, electricity, famine, refuse disposal, and among others.
- Health information: This includes information about how people can control various diseases that disturb them and the consciousness of available health care services and what it takes.
- Farming and allied livelihoods: - one of the essential information requirements by rural Nigerians is in the agricultural sector. It may include planting treated seeds, soil conservation, prevention of plants and animal disease, fertilizer application, farm machinery, adequate storage of agricultural products, marketing strategies, cooperative activities and other agro-cultural activities.
- Education: - Rural inhabitants need information about the necessity to educate their wards and the populace. They need to have sufficient information to support training and learning processes in their areas.
- Housing: - rural dwellers also need knowledge on how they can get loans if available to erect houses and the type of tools to be used.

Rural Access to Information as a Panacea for Nigeria's Development

- **Transportation:** - the need to have information about the cost and usage of trucks and where to get them and also information on road usage, traffic laws and road maintenance is necessary.
- **Religion, Recreation, and Culture:** - information on the need to reform some cultural beliefs that impede development is also paramount.
- **Legal problems:** - information is required on rules and regulations that guide the rural inhabitants, such provision may include rules concerning land acquisition and property ownership, crime control as well as safety.
- **Government policies:** - information about existing government policies on rural development and the need to pursue and support such policies is necessary.
- **Technologies and Gadgets;** - the rural dwellers need to know about the trends, recent and changes in technologies and Gadgets.

Underpinning Theory

According to Stephen and Foss (2009). Communication Goal Theory was developed by Charles and Richard in 1975 to explain the importance of information in all human societies. The theory argued that goal is a desired end of an individual, groups and societies. Thus effective information, communication, coordination and cooperation are prerequisites for the attainment of the needed goal.

Information is a vital component of human development. It is a process in which people become aware and informed about events and activities in their environment. Information differentiates human from non-human. Human development depends on some significant level of information.

Researchers have shown that sustainable development is the goal of all successive administrations in Nigeria. The achievement of this desired goal requires not only good policies, commitment but also efficient and useful communication channels among all sectors of the societies. The importance of rural sector to the development of a nation like Nigeria can never be overemphasized. Thus, rural dwellers need to be provided with necessary information about what is going on in their immediate environment and the world at large to enable them contribute their quota to the development of the nation. The source of information through which rural communities can be carried along could be people, media, billboard, flier, notice board among others.

Relevance of Rural Communities to Nigeria

Akpomuvie (2010) emphasized the needs for rural development in Nigeria. When he averred that the imperative of rural development in the present-day Nigerian society could not be underrated as its significance stems from the vital roles the rural enclave performs in the course of realizing the improvement of the political, social, economic, and cultural development of the society.

There is no doubt that, rural area is the predominant food and fiber producing a sector of the country. Apart from diet and fiber, it can be observed that almost all natural resources which constitute the wealth of a nation are obtained from the rural areas (Ekong, 2010). In his contribution, Rasheed (2012) submitted that it's hard to deny the tremendous contribution of rural community and its people to world agriculture, food security and sustenance of human race.

The rural area in Nigeria is also relevant because it is the backbone of the national population and serves the urban areas with human resources. Moreover, in the case of national emergencies, rural communities are not only the place of refuge but also constitute a vast reservoir of national patriotism because ruralites are relatively unaffected by internationalism and pacifism flourishing among the diverse peoples of the City. Again, due to the relative conservativeness of ruralites and natural resistance of rural culture to rapid change, rural area is a crucial tool for conserving the growing cultures and traditions of the nation which are often quickly discarded in urban areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The growth and development of Nigeria depend on the improvement of their rural communities. Efficient information service system, as well as proper coordination, is an essential component for development. Thus, quality information service vis-à-vis rural development in Nigeria's rural communities must be given enough priority to reduce societal problems like; crime, environmental pollution, traffic and accommodation congestion, rural-urban movement, anxiety in the country and underdeveloped when compared with first world countries.

A public-private partnership should be encouraged in the area of information dissemination in Nigeria rural areas for national sustainable development. There should be adequate access to knowledge and reporting by illiterates who constitute the majority of local inhabitants. Citizen participation should be promoted to know the felt needs of the rural communities. That is, the ruralites should be carried along in developmental policies formulation and implementation processes.

People in rural areas must be able to overcome the problems of the ecosystem, pursue a broad range of activities to intensify their productivity and be more educated to promoting greater skills acquisition cum entrepreneur through relevant information.

Rural communities are the primary sectors of every nation's economy, and their rapid expansion must be in front burner of every government agency all over the world. It is because a sizeable majority of the global population lives therein. Hence, the destiny of the Nigeria nation relies heavily on the development of rural areas.

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