

THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT OF RURAL GBAGYI WOMEN IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated information environment of rural Gbagyi women in Niger state, Nigeria. The general objective of the study was to access the information needs, seeking habits and sources of information of rural Gbagyi women in Niger state. Descriptive survey was used for the study. The population of the study comprised of Gbagyi women of Niger east senatorial zone, 250 rural women were sampled from various communities using simple random sampling technique. Data was collected by means of structured questionnaires and analyzed using frequency count and simple percentage. Findings show that majority of the respondents need information to improve their agricultural activities, and on health issues, child care, religious and political activities. Further revelations show that a good number of the respondents relied on their friends, neighbours, family and radio as the most important sources of information. While the major constraints to accessing information are unavailability of information source, obsolete information and lack of information center. The study therefore recommend the establishment of community and women information center and other community outreach programmes to provide packaged and timely information to the rural women.

Introduction

Information is the resource of value in any society. It is only through information that people exchange ideas and acquires different skills, increase their knowledge, get awareness and change their behaviour and opinion about certain beliefs that is capable of leading to development. No wonder Aboyade (1987) viewed information as the basic need for the progress of society while Nwalo (2000) described it as the key resource for maintaining a healthy economy for improvement of quality of life and for operatory democracy. According to Mooko and Aina (2007), every individual, whether literate or illeterate, needs information for a variety of issues essential for his or her survival, it is therefore, not surprising that information is needed for, awareness, increased productivity, health etc.

Since information is so vital that it is even seen as one of the basic needs of life, then it should be made available to all categories of people including women.

Women are special creatures who are very important in the society playing vital roles in shaping the mind of the young ones who keep generations of man in existence. Women as mothers nurture the child; give him love, care, compassion and the right type of upbringing required by the society. While as wives, they take care of the home, provide her husband with companionship, comfort and refuge in times of troubles.

The greater percentage of women in Africa live in the rural areas, where they contribute immensely to the economic sustenance of an Africa family. 'In most Africa countries, rural women are the food farmers, and carry the burdens of life. Africa's 100 million rural women grow almost 80% of Africa's food, including food for subsistence and food for markets' (Kongol and Bamgbose, 2002). Despite their contribution to building virile family, African women are still disenfranchised in so many ways; their contributions have not been adequately acknowledged by the society, especially the rural women. For instance, it was reported by Jiggins, Samantha and Olawoye that the official definition of a farmer in Nigerian in 1965, for example, was given as "an adult male..." who has the right to the produce of a farm... women are not classified as farmers (FOS, P, 79). Gender disparity (with girls and women as the disadvantaged) is well known feature of Nigerians educational landscape. This trend is peculiar to many African countries. Kongolo and Bamgose, (2002) reported thus:

The impact of development on women in South African is quite different for both urban and rural women. Infact, there is substantial evidence that rural women are mostly neglected, and consistently have lost in this process (Meer, 1998). There is also overwhelming evidence of development policies and projects formulated by passing the involvement of rural women in most African countries (Hunger project, 2002). The majority of the population in LDCs live in rural areas, approximately 70% being women (Cartledge, 1995). (Kongolo and Bamgose, 2002, P79).

Nigeria is divided into 36 states with the Federal Capital Territory. Nineteen of the states are located in the savannah north with predominant Muslim population and covering more than half of the country's land mass. Niger state is one of the states in northern Nigeria and indeed the largest in term of land mass which covers 76,363 square kilometers. Niger state was created from the Old North-Western

state on the 3rd of February, 1976. It has an estimated population of 3,954,772 with Mina as its capital. It shares boundaries with Kaduna state and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja in the north-east, Kebbi and Zamfara in the north-west, Kwara and Kogi state in the south and Benin republic in the west. The major ethnic groups of the state are Nupe, Gbagyi and Hausa while the minority tribes include the Koro, Kadara, kamuku, Fulani, Kambari, Bisanyan etc.

The Gbagyi ethnic group occupies the eastern senatorial district covering eight of the twenty five government areas of the state. Majority of them live in the rural area with agricultural activities forming the mainstay of their economy, either directly or indirectly. Their women are notable for involvement in agricultural activities such as yam production and the cultivation of other arable crops and marketing of such farm products. To successfully carry out these and other activities, appropriate information is required by the rural Gbagyi women like their counterparts in the cities.

Therefore there is the need to understand the information environment of the rural Gbagyi women. According to Mooko and Aina (2007) in studying the information needs of an individual, the information needs have to be studied in the context of the information environment, which includes not only the information needs but also the information seeking behaviours, access to information and sources of information used for meeting information needs.

Statement of Problem

Women are known to be care givers and trainers, they carry a lot of responsibilities both as mothers and wives and at the same time these loving creatures are perceived as people with low status in various societies, but particularly in Nigeria as second class citizen; they are marginalized, left behind and backward socially, educationally and economically. Majority of them live in the rural areas distant from urban celebration civilization and activities in many communities, they are involved at different levels of farm activities, in spite of the existence of various opportunities available to improve the life of rural women, it is only the city dwellers that benefit from such opportunities, which might not be unconnected to poor information delivery to the rural women. It is against this backdrop, that this study investigates the information environment of rural women in Niger state.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the various information needs of rural Gbagyi women in Niger State?
2. What are the sources through which rural Gbagyi women access information?
3. What are the information seeking habits of rural Gbagyi women in Niger state?
4. What do rural Gbagyi women in Niger State use information for?
5. What are the constraints of information access by rural Gbagyi women in Niger State?

Literature Review

Information need could be regarded as the vacuum that exists between what an individual has already known and what he needs to know in order to make progress. It is therefore not restricted to any social group, race or age. There have been several studies targeting information needs of selected people and interest groups; Abdullahi and Haruna (2006) investigated on the information needs and seeking behaviour of Islamic studies teachers in secondary schools in Borno state, Nigeria and established that Islamic studies teachers in secondary schools in Borno state need information on their areas of specialities followed by information on their profession and general knowledge.

Mabawanku (2004) reported that information needs of the artisan in Ibadan Oyo state of Nigeria are not different from those of their counterparts in other profession and other countries all over the world that the people needs information that would enable them to perform their jobs better, they also need information on health, politics/government and financial matter.

Halseth, (1998) in a survey of the Community Economic development goal in British Columbia in Canada reported that the most important issue connected with the information needs of community (economic) development groups concerns the issues of "breadth". Drawing directly from the kinds of mission and mandate statements these group have, it is clear that the breadth of information needs is

closely connected with the range of interests and issues the group hopes to address. For rural community group especially, they were looking for a very wide range of information. A second issue concerns the time frame within which information is needed. In this case we are able to distinguish between “routine” and “periodically” needed information resources. Routinely needed information was that deemed necessary for group organization and development. This included access to the experiences for group to government program information, to further training opportunities, and access to basic community development research. Information needed on a periodic basis might best be thought of as basic research data. This included economic sector data, demographic information, and census data. Access to this type of information was only needed for specific projects or reports, but when it was needed, it was needed right away.

Ikoja-Odongo (2001) studied the information needs and uses of the informal sector in Uganda and submitted that their information needs varied at different times. Marketing information needs rated highest at 22.7%, the need for raw material and/or supply information was second at 15.9.0% and seeking advice was third at 13.6%. Looking for contracts amounted to 9.0% advertising services came to 9.0% and needing information about government policies that affect them constituted 4.5% and information on seasonal effects amounted to 4.5%. Other information needs (15.4%) were related to the size of fishing nets, control of water hyacinths, getting rid of floating islands (suds), competitors and particular designs of products and new tools. Findings indicate that information was used for accessing more markets (25%) locating sources of raw materials/supplies at cheaper prices (16.6%), obtaining information about business development (10.4%), establishing prices and pricing techniques (6.3%), achieving business and technical skills (6.3%), and negotiating contracts (8.3%). Information was also used for seeking new tools. This indicates that information usage comes into close contact with social problems solving.

Women like other people need information to take wise decisions and perform their responsibilities thus a lot has been written on their information needs and seeking behaviour. Onemolese (2002) studied the extension needs of women cassava farmers in Edo state and reported that the major sources of information were family and friends. Mchombu (2002) also investigated the information needs of women in small scale business in Botswana, and the identified information

needs were business management, source of financial assistance, business diversification and legal information. The study also found that the women obtain their information through informal channels. In the study on women in the formal sector in Uganda, Ikoja-Odongo (2004) found that women often seek information from sources that are quite close to their work environment. They also rely on sources like colleagues, friends, family and clients for information. The television, radio, newspaper and interaction with government agents, politicians social networks were also sources of information.

Constraints to information access

In spite of the importance of information in every human activity, there are still a lot of factors that hindered its accessibility. From his study Ikoja-Odongo (2004) found that constraints to information access has to do with the unreliability of information they received, especially when the source was word of mouth, the preferred channel for receiving information. Word of mouth has, of course, inherent weakness. Information is delivered by different people and it is often inaccurate. It is common share hearsay as correct information. In some case, information is distorted as it passes from one individual to another, and frequently people with information do not release it easily when asked, they hide it. It is presumed this is a natural consequence of competition and the perceived need to use information to one's own strategic advantage. The inability to secure required information was also stated as a difficulty. This may result from a variety of causes including an inability to determine where the needed information might be, the inability to go to the place the information may be located, a lack of time to search for information, the lack of a specific place to get information, ignorance resulting from illiteracy, non appreciation of information, the incapacity to look for information due to a disability, failure of telephone lines, information brokers requiring a commission, and the packaging of information in languages not understood by the information seeker.

In his submission, Oyediran (2004) reported that, unavailability of desired information resources, accessibility problems, obsolescence and absence of on-line facilities is attributed to the low patronage of library by students users.

Methodology

The research method adopted for this study is the social survey method. This is adopted because of its suitability for the study. According to Aina and Ajiferuke (2002) social survey method involves a systematic and comprehensive collection of information about the opinions, attitudes, feelings, belief and behaviours of people. The population of the study comprises of the entire rural gbagyi women in Niger east senatorial district of Niger state. They are spread across eight local government areas of the state. Three of the eight local governments of the senatorial district were sampled using simple random sampling technique. Two hundred and fifty rural women were randomly sampled from two villages in each of the three local governments. The instrument tagged Information Environment of Rural Women Questionnaire (IERWQ) was developed and used for the study. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts. A total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and 235 representing 94% were returned and found usable.

Demographic data of the respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Age

Age (yrs)	Frequency	Percentage %
15-25	150	63.83%
26-35	50	21.27%
35 and above	35	14.90%
Total	235	100.00%

Table 1 above shows that 150 (63.83%) of the respondents belong to the age groups of 15-25. Also 50 and 35 of the respondents belong to the age group of 26-35 and above respectively. Majority of the respondents belong to the age group of 15-25 because may be they are more active in seeking information in the rural environment.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Education

Level of education	Frequency	Percentage %
Primary S.	30	12.77%
JSS	25	10.64%
SSCE	20	8.51%
Post Sec.	10	4.25%
Non-literate	150	68.83%
Total	235	100.00%

Table 2 above shows that 150 (68.83%) of the respondents are not educated, 25 (10.64) attends primary school, 25 (10.64) had junior secondary education, 20 (8.51) had senior secondary education while only 10 (94.25%) had post secondary school education. This shows that majority of the rural women had no formal education. This is typical of rural centre in Nigeria where illiteracy rate is high.

Table 3: Information Needs

Responses	Yes	No	Total
Information on agriculture activities	235	-	235
	100%		100%
Information on agriculture loan	235	-	235
	100%		100%
Information on marketing of your agriculture produce	235	-	235
	100%		100%
Information on culture of your people	226	9	235
	96.18%	3.82%	
Information on religious activities	226	9	235
	96.18%	3.82%	100%
Information on adult education	151	84	235
	35.75%	35.75%	100%
Information on women association	225	10	235
	95.75%	4.25%	100%
Information on business opportunities	226	9	235
	96.18%	3.82%	100%
Information on women participation in policies	70.22%	70(29.78%)	100%
Information on political activities	185	50	235
	78.73%	21.27%	100%
Information on government activities	225	10	235
	95.75%	4.25%	100%
Information on medical facilities	235	-	235

From the table above, it is revealed that all the respondents 235 (100%) indicated that they needed information on agriculture activities, agriculture loan, information on marketing of their agriculture produce, medical facilities and information on child facilities and information on child care. Followed by 226

(96.18%) respondents who indicated that they needed information on religious activities culture of their problem and business opportunities while 9 (3.82%) respondents said they don't. a great number of the respondents 225 represent (95.75%) needed information on women association and government activities and 10 (4.25%) respondents who said yes they needed information on women participation in politics while 70 (29.78%) respondents said no. adult education is the least needed information with 15 (64.25%) respondents who said yes they needed the information and 84 (35.75%) said no.

It is evident that the respondents are more concern with information on agriculture and other aspect than adult education from the response given.

Table 4: Information Sources

Responses	Yes		No			Total
Radio	235	100%			235	100%
Television	235	100%			235	100%
Agric extension workers	29	12.35%	206	87.65%	235	100%
Social workers	5	2.13%	230	97.87%	235	100%
Community library	0	0				
Newspapers	29	12.35%	206	87.65%	235	100%
Internet	9	3.83%	226	96.17%	235	100%
Religious leaders	83	35.32%	152	64.68%	235	100%

The table above shows that all the respondents 235 (100%) indicated that radio and television are their source of information. This is followed by 83 (35.32%) respondents, who said that they receive information through their religious leaders. While 152 (64.68%) said they do not. 29 (12.35%) respondents indicate that they get their information from agric extension but 206 (87.65%) respondents said they do not. The next is 9 (3.83%) responded who attested that internet is their source of information. While 226 (96.17%) stated that is not their source of information. Social workers has 5 (2.13%) respondents who claimed that they are their source of information and 230 (97.87%) said no. none of the respondents indicated

community library as their source of information. This shows that the rural women do not source information from community library since they don't even have.

Table 5: Information Seeking Habit

Responses	Yes		No		Total	
Contacting people who know	235	100%			235	100%
Talking and listening to people	200	85.11%	35		235	100%
Asking friends relatives and neighbours	235	100%			235	100%
Inquiring from educated people	226	96.18	9	3.82	235	100%
Inquiring from ward and councilor	226	96.18	9	3.82	235	100%
Using social networks	151	35.75	84	35.75	235	100%
Asking and listening to politicians	225	95.75	10	4.25	235	100%
Visit to the city	226	96.18	9	3.82	235	100%
Telephone calls	185	70.22	70	29.78	235	100%
Visiting the library	185	78.73	50	21.27	235	100%

The study also investigate the information seeking habit of the rural women. From the table all 235 representing (100%) claimed that they seek information by contacting people who know and by asking friends, relatives and neighbours followed by 200 (84.11%) respondent whose information seeking habit is talking and listening to people and inquiring from educated people while 35 (14.59%) respondents said that is how they get their information. The next is 83 (35.32%) respondent who visit the city and mosque and church to seek information but 152 (64.68%) said they don't 29 (12.35%) respondents indicated that they seek information through telephone calls while 70 (29.78%) said no, 11 (4.69) inquire from ward and councilors and 224 (95.31%) said no, (4.26%) use social network but 225 (95.74%) respondents do not. Asking and listening to politicians followed with 9 (3.83%) that indicated yes and 226 (96.17) that disagree. Visiting the library is the least indicated with 5 (2.13%) respondent who claimed yes and 230 (97.87%) respondents said no. this implies that only few among the rural women inquire information from the library and this due to the fact that most rural areas do not have libraries.

Table 6: Information Use

Responses	Yes		No		Total	
To improve your agricultural activities	217	92	18	7.65%	235	100%
To improve your business	217		18	7.65%	235	100%
		92.35				
To decide on who to vote during elections	217		18	7	235	100%
		92.35	65%			
	%					
To participate in women associations	101		134		235	100%
		42.98		57.02		
	%		%			
To adopt new fashion of the city	201	85	40	17.02	235	100%
	54%					
To seek adult education	75		160		235	100%
		31.92		68.08		
	%		%			
To improve your religion	217	92	18	7.65%	235	100%
	35%					

From the table above 217 respondent representing (92.35) agreed that they use information to improve their business, to improve their religious activities and to decide on who to vote during election but 18 (7.65) do not follow by 20 respondent who use information to adopt new fashion in the city and 34 (14.46%) said they do not. Also 101 claimed they use information to participate in women association while 134 (57.02%) who indicated yes and 160 (68.08%) respondent who said no. it is evident that most of the respondent use information to improve in all the above listed items.

Table 7: Reasons for Constraints to Information Access

Responses	Yes		No	Total
Information is not always available	235	100%	-	
Information comes very late	235	100%	-	
Some information are not reliable	150	63.83%	85	36.17%
Information sources are not current	180	76.59%	55	23.41%
Information comes informant I do not understand	180	76.59%	55	23.41%
There is no community information centre	235	100%	-	
There is no community library	235	100%		
High cost information sources	200	85.11%	35	14.89%

The study further investigate the constraint to the information access of the respondent as shown in the table 235 (100%) respondents admitted that non availability information centre, and lack of community library as their major constraint to information access 20 (85.11%) claimed high cost of information to be their constraint to information access while 35 (14.89%) of them respondent negatively. Also 180 (76.59%) respondent attested that information sources are not current and information access against 55 (23.41%) who stated that it is a problem unreliability of information is the least encountered problem from the list of constraint having 150 (63.83%) respondent saying it was a problem while 85 (36.17%) said it was a problem. From the table, it shows that the respondent are faced with many and different problems when accessing information.

Summary of Finding

Findings from the study shows that the respondent needed information on different aspects of life especially agriculture since most of them are farmers, medical facilities, child care, politics and women association. Further revelation shows that due to the low level of literacy of the respondents, book newspaper magazines and libraries were not their major sources of information; respondents relied on radio and television as their source of information, as for their information seeking

behaviours the respondents relied on the interpersonal sources like family friends and neighbours and their mosques and churches. This corroborates findings by Onemolese (2002) and Ikoja-Odongo (2004).

It was also found in the study that even though the respondents use information to improve their occupations, business, health, religious social activities etc. they are faced with various problems in accessing information, among the problems are non availability of information, even when they get the information it will come every late and therefore not current, they don't have community information centre talk less of a community library. A library is not even known to the rural women as an information centre.

Conclusion

Based on the above findings the study concludes that the rural gbagyi women in Niger state of Nigeria need information to improve on different aspect of life but the fact that they are living in the rural areas makes it difficult for them to get access to timely information and no provisions is made to improve the situation.

Based on the above finding and conclusion reached it is recommended that government should establish community information centre in each ward in Nigeria and each of the centres should have a separate section specially for women to cater for their information needs. Since mass media are consulted and regarded as credible source of information by the rural women, the information centre and agencies should cooperate with the media house to package a programme that will be disseminating the rural women with their various information needs.

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