

Need For Information Management as a Strategy for Development of Rural Rivers State, Southern Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Effective. Dissemination. Rural People. Development. Educational Opportunities. Job

ABSTRACT The study focused on the need for proper information management as a strategy for the development of rural areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. The areas of the study included Ogba/Egbema-Ndoni, Eleme and Ikwerre local districts in Rivers State, Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was used to select communities from the three local government areas. They were selected based on ward allocation. A total of fifty (50) questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Percentages, frequency and mean scores were utilized for data analysis. The study identified seven profound effects of proper information management for the development of the study areas. They were: increase in job and educational opportunities (3.20), modernization and development of the community (2.70), high level of education and literacy rate (3.6), low morbidity and infant/mortality rate (3.20), improved hygiene/sanitation condition (4.10), improved standard of living (3.40) and improved economic standard and capacity utilization (3.0). Furthermore, the study found that there was no office for the management of information dissemination in the study areas. Also, there was no monitoring and feedback mechanism in the local government councils. It was then recommended that appropriate information structure and the offices of information officer and community liaison officer be established for effective liaison in information management and dissemination to enhance rural development in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Information has been identified as one of the basic resources required for the improvement of man and society. It is very important because virtually every action taken or anything done is as a result of information received. Our personality is a product of information received either through reading or listening to others. The society is rapidly and constantly changing as a result of availability of more information to the people. According to Milliken (1987) of all the technological changes which have been sweeping through the traditional societies of the developing world in the last two decades, the most fundamental and persuasive in their effects on human society have been in communication of information. Wherever change occurs in human society, there will be evidence of information flow. The basic elements of adapting oneself to the environment or adapting the environment to oneself are information. We must have some information about what is going on in our environment, and we must have some information about ourselves, our intentions, goals and wants in-order to respond appropriately and advance in the right direction. The getting or giving of information underlies all communication

encountered either directly or indirectly. Information is basic to all of the other applied functions of communication. Communication occurs when someone is acquiring or consuming some information about himself or his environment. The concept of communication of information is very vital in rural development. Any segment of the society that does not have effective transfer of information will not experience sustainable development.

In May 2005, the Federal Government of Nigeria wrote a circular and sent it out to all the 774 local government areas in the country. The content was that local government council should compile a list of all the unemployed youths in their domain and forward the same to the state for onward transmission to the Federal Government. The intention was to set up a data bank of unemployed youths particularly those that graduated from tertiary institutions. The exercise failed in many local government areas as they were not able to circulate the information to their constituencies. Aina (1995) noted that a lot of information is continually generated in Africa but the problem lies with dissemination of generated information. The result was that data obtained were not reliable as information do not flow adequately from the local government office to

the people in their domain which is a characteristic of poor information management. The people had been deprived of opportunities in enhancement of living standard. Another effect of poor information management is retarded development. Even where there is development, it is not accelerated. Lack of information also leads to loss of opportunities for growth and development. Information brings education and wealth but lack of it results in myopia and intolerance. High infant mortality, high maternal death rate and low life expectancy. There is high degree of ignorance in the rural communities, this include political, scientific, economic, social and religious ignorance. Ignorance is anti-theatrical to development. The result of this ignorance is poverty. Ibeabuchi (2005) noted that most of the women living with HIV/AIDS were from the rural areas because most of them are deprived of adequate information. This study will help to instill a conscious effort on proper information management in Nigerian rural areas.

Purpose of the Study

The study was designed to do the following: establish the place of effective information management as a strategy for rural development, instill a conscious effort of proper information flow at the local government level and create a structure for proper information flow in our rural communities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Rivers State Nigeria. Three LGAs namely Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Eleme and Ikwerre were selected from the three senatorial district in Rivers State. That is, one local government area from each senatorial district Rivers State. Rivers State is located in the Niger Delta region in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Two stage sampling method was used to select the respondents for this study. The first stage involved the purposive sampling technique in which Ogba-Egbema-Ndoni, Eleme and Ikwerre local government areas were selected from the senatorial district in Rivers State. They were selected because of their semi-urban nature. The second stage was the stratified random sampling which was used to sample out seventeen (17) communities from the three local government areas. The communities were

selected on ward allocation. The study focused on the secretaries to the local government areas, the councilors representing the wards, the local leaders of the communities and group/youth leaders of the communities. These group of persons were selected because of their link with the rural people. A total of fifty (50) questionnaires were distributed to 3 secretaries of the 3 LGAs, 6 councilors representing the wards, 17 local leaders of the 17 communities and 24 group/youth leaders. Data collected were analyzed using cross tabulation, tables and mean scores applying four point Likert type scale of most effective (4) effective (3), less effective (2) and not effective (1) and cut-off point was 2.50.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The Place of Effective Information Management as a Strategy for Rural Development

Table 1 identified seven profound effects of availability of information meant for the rural communities. The seven most effective ones were increase in job and educational opportunities (2.90), modernization and development of the community (2.70), High level of education and literacy rate (2.60), low morbidity and infant/maternal rate (3.20), improved hygiene and sanitary condition (4.10), improved standard of living (2.70), improved economic standard and capacity utilization (3.00) while improved infrastructural development and government attention (2.37) was the less effective one. This result shows that when information is properly managed and effectively communicated to its end users (rural community) it has profound effect on the rural dwellers. Igboke and Ajala (1995) see rural development as a multi-dimensional process by which the productivity income and welfare in terms of health, nutrition, education and other features of satisfactory life of rural people can be improved or transformed. While Olowu (2004) stated that efficient dissemination of appropriate information is the beginning of our journey toward attaining the nations objective of sustainable development. Also, Adams (1987) said information is passed from a source to a receiver for the purpose of affecting a desired change.

The result in table 2 established that there is no offices in-charge of the dissemination of information to the grassroots. This has defeated one of the purposes of creating the local

Table 1: Effects of availability of information to rural communities

<i>Effects</i>	<i>Mean Score</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Increase in job and education opportunities	2.90	ME
Modernization and development of the community	2.70	ME
High level of education and literacy rate	2.60	ME
Improved hygiene/sanitation condition	3.10	ME
Improved standard of living	2.70	ME
Improved economic standard capacity utilization	3.00	ME
Improved infrastructural development and government attention	2.57	LE
Low morbidity and infant/maternal rate	3.20	ME

Mean score ≥ 2.5 – Most Effective (ME) Mean score < 2.5 – Less Effective (LE).

Table 2: Efforts of proper information management at the local government council.

<i>Items</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Is there any officer in-charge of the dissemination of information to communities under your domain?	45(90.0)	5(10.0)
The councilor representing the wards is he the best person to disseminate information to the rural people?	40(80.0)	10(20.0)
The purpose of creating LGA in terms of information dissemination, has it been achieved in your LGA	42(84.0)	8(16.0)
Is there any monitoring mechanism of information in your LGA?	46(42.0)	4(8.0)
Do you receive feedbacks of information sent out by your council?	41(82.0)	9(18.0)
Any other effort made by the LGA to disseminate information through the radio and newspaper?	5(10.0)	45(90.0)
Are you in support of an office of information officer to be established in the LGA who will be in-charge of information meant for the communities under the local government council?	3(6.0)	47(94.0)

Figures in parentheses are in percentages

government area by the Federal Government. Local Government aims at bringing the presence of federal and state governments to the people. Furthermore, it revealed that councilors are not the appropriate people to disseminate information since they are political appointees. Instead, the local/traditional leaders, Community Development Committee (CDC), Community forum, group/youth leaders should be used to disseminate information to the grassroots. Finally, it shows that even where the local government council disseminates information through newspaper and radio, there is no monitoring and feedback mechanism set in place to ascertain that the information gets to the people. This is contrary to Adebayo et al. (2005) who concluded that the communication of information consists of six essential elements, they are: source/sender, message/information, channel/medium, receivers/effect and feedback. The information flow in the local government councils lack the basic elements in simple communication process.

In figure 1, structure of information flow was put in place for the local government level. Information from Government House/Rivers State House of Assembly/State or Federal Ministries will get to the information officer at the local

government area who will disseminate such information to the local government chairman/executive and local government legislature. This is because the office of the chairman and legislature is temporary, their maximum period in office is five years, and after that, the chairman is out and a caretaker committee takes over pending when another election will be conducted. But the office of the information officer is a continuation from the state ministry; when he retires, another person takes over immediately. The information officer will work with the community liaison officer, who will take the information to the community leaders, youth leaders etc. For efficient dissemination of information, the community liaison officer should not cover more than five communities.

With this structure, the rural people will no longer be myopia in information concerning their environments. They will be enlightened on new technologies and developments about their environment and this will enable them to respond appropriately. It will also lead to accelerated development as there will be a high level of literacy, job and education opportunities among the rural dwellers. When the people are enlightened, poverty will be reduced and this will lead to

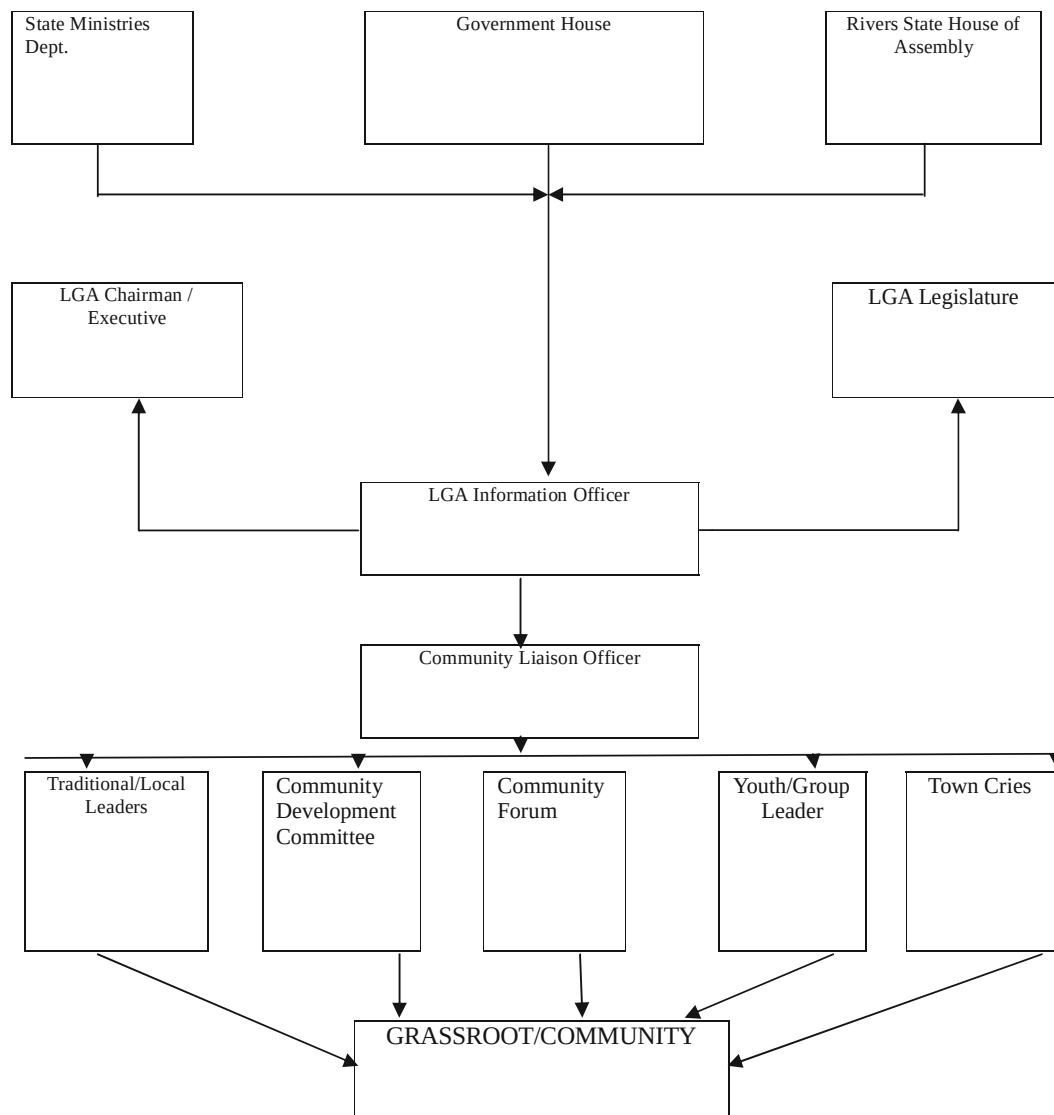


Fig. 1. Framework for proper information flow in Nigeria rural community.

improved economic standard and capacity utilization.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study established seven profound effects or advantages of effective information mode available to the rural people. They are increase in job and educational opportunities

(2.90), high level of education and literacy rate (2.60), improved standard of living (2.70), modernization and development of the community (2.70), improved hygiene/sanitation condition (3.10), low morbidity and infant maternal death rate (3.20) improved economic standard and capacity utilization. The study also found that there was no officer in-charge of information dissemination at the local government council, thereby limiting

one of the purposes for the creation of local government areas by the federal government in Nigeria. Even where the local government council disseminate information to constituencies under her domain through radio and television, there is no monitoring and feedback mechanism put in place to ascertain its effectiveness. Therefore, a structure for proper information flow in the local government level was created.

It is therefore concluded that there is no officer charged with rural information communication or rural supervisor who represents the local government area as the commission or permanent secretary of information in the state. There is no information gathering mechanism in the rural areas. The rural people depend on unofficial sources or stray information on the grave vine. Worst still, there is no reverse flow of information from the grassroots to the top (state/local government council). So, the study recommends that the office of an information officer be established at the local government council to work or liaise with a community liaison officer four communities to one community liaison officer. This will bridge the

information gap in the rural communities to enhance rural development.

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