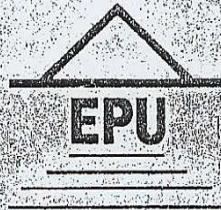


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## THE POTENTIALS OF INDIGENOUS INFORMATION SOURCES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract.** This study examined various sources of information in Okuku community of Imo State, Nigeria and assessed their potentials for rural community development. The methodology for this study is anthropological. In the main, focus group discussion (FGD) was used to collect data for the study. This involved a group discussion that gathered people from similar backgrounds and experience to discuss topics central to the objective of the study. The participants were purposively selected and this ensured group dynamics. Some of the sources of information available in the rural communities include local chiefs, priests, parents, senior relations especially those living in the cities, age-grades, local school teachers and local councilors. The study also reveals that people judge the validity of the source and the message it carries by using their evaluation of the speaker providing the message people whose message are usually regarded as credible are usually recognized leaders with good character. The study recommends the use of sources, which are locally familiar and rooted in the culture of the people for providing development information to the people in order to enhance acceptability for rural development.

### Introduction

Africans have traditions that help in the organization of their societies (Madu 1999). One component of African tradition, which has helped in the organization, and sustenance of its society is the indigenous information system, which has an in built mechanism for sourcing information. Those sources of information form the basis for its acceptance or rejection in the villages. They assist in decision-making and consequently lead to indigenous innovation.

Gecan (1995:557) on BBC world news as related in local station stated that:

*"The elders were aware that the news came from those who had conquered and dominated them and it was listened to with close attention"*

This assessment of exogenous sources of information based on suspicion is very common in traditional Igbo societies where almost every aspect of life is governed by tradition. Summarising the community factor in media news, Fredric and Kosiki (1989) agreed that the conceptualization of the metropolitan news media and their location in the social fabric suggests that they affect the overall assessments that people make of the metropolitan areas.

This paper examined the level of acceptability and co-operation people in the rural areas give to the various sources of information available to them. With a well-defined indigenous information system, the traditional system also provides for sources of information in the communities. This study identifies these sources and makes effort to evaluate each source and see what makes it accepted to the people especially in the dissemination of development related information.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The main problem of this research is that much of the information provided for rural development in Nigeria fail to achieve the purpose. For instance, in 1976, when the Federal Information Centres (FIC) an offshoot of federal public enlightenment centres were established in all the state capitals with the primary aim of disseminating information on agriculture, health, education etc. They were also to enlighten the people on federal government activities like census, election and budgets. Available reports by government research institutes, national newspapers and personal observations have proved beyond reasonable doubt that the huge government investment on such media establishments in the states has failed to yield the desired results. This failure is blamed on the nature of the sources of information employed by government. In view of the fact that the traditional African societies are more culture bound than the urban areas, how does the source of information affect its potential in information dissemination effort at the grass roots? This is the central focus of this study as it outlines a case study of Okuku, a rural community in Imo State, the heart of Igbo land.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the various sources of information available in the rural areas;
2. To distinguish between the internally initiated sources and the external sources that are also available to the rural people.

3. To evaluate the potentials of these sources by determining the factors that affect their acceptability or rejection by the people at the grass root; and
4. To determine how information provision and acceptability affect government activities.

### Methodology

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect data for this study. Essentially, this involved a group discussion that gathered people from similar backgrounds and experiences to discuss topics central to the objectives of this study. Generally, the participants were purposively chosen. Focus groups were conventionally homogenous, that is, the participants were recruited to particular groups on the basis of some common characteristics. This is to maximize within the group and to avoid a situation where individuals dominate or withdraw because of difference in class, sex, age, experience, acquired knowledge, or any other characteristics salient to the discussion.

The discussions were also characterized by group dynamics. The informal setting, relaxed atmosphere and open-ended nature of questions were used to encourage participants to feel free from the constraint typical of one to one interview and ensured they expressed their view openly and spontaneously. The setting of the discussions on this research was in the neutral and natural settings. For instance, the Ekeiwu Okuku Market Square and the Okuku Community School were used as venues. The researcher allowed for sufficient time for the recruitment of members of the group. The time of session (date and hour) was also appropriate and convenient to the members. The size of the groups ranges from 5-15. The researcher also acted as a facilitator. He was responsible in ensuring that the discussions were conducted in a relaxed manner bearing in mind the objectives of the research. The researcher made use of a discussion guide, which had earlier been prepared. The guide was based on the headings, which are central to the objectives of the study.

The researcher was assisted by a note taker/recorder. Materials/instruments used for the exercise include tape recorder, cassettes, and writing materials. The note taker recorded the discussions and was able to retain the impression and information given by members of the group. Entertainment was provided for the groups in the course of the discussions and this encouraged them to fully co-operate.

A Look at the size of the groups as shown on Table 1 shows that of the twenty three groups, the composition of majority of the groups ranged between 10- 12 as eleven groups fall into that category. This is followed by groups of between 8-9 category. The category of between 13-14 members had three

TABLE 1:

CHARACTERISTICS OF MEMBERS OF THE GROUPS

CHARACTERISTICS		GROUPS																						
1	Size of the groups	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
5-7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
8-9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10-12	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
13-15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	AGE																							
25-30	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
31-40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
41-50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
51-60	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
61-65	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
66-75	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	OCCUPATION																							
Farming	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teaching	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Petty Trading	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palm wine tapping	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hunting	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION																							
Below Primary 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Primary 1-6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
WASC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Above WASC	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	LANGUAGES																							
Igbo	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
English	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6	NUMBER OF CHILDREN																							
1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1-2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3-4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5-6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7-8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9 AND ABOVE	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

KEY: + APPLICABLE (a member of the group falls into the category )  
 - NOT APPLICABLE (A member of does not fall)

group while only one group had as low as 5-7 members. This small group is not unconnected with the very young age of members. As very few youths occupy the position of tradition and leaders who are the focus of the study.

On the age of the members of the groups, it has also shown from table 1<sup>2</sup> that in most of the groups, participants were between the age ranges 61-65.

From the age range involved in the group discussions, it appeared that the more elderly members were involved in the discussions. This can be explained by the nature of the research which is focused on the culture of the people. The elderly members of the community were seen as more resourceful because of their age and experience and wisdom that go with it.

The other characteristics of the members of the group is occupation. Table 1<sup>3</sup> shows the majority of members of the group, engage in farming as an occupation. This is closely followed by petty trading. These days, petty trading is used to complement what they gain from farming which is no longer as lucrative as it used to be. Ranking third in this order is teaching. The few educated ones in the community resort to teaching in the primary schools as grade 2 teachers. Ranking below teaching is hunting which is one of the traditional festivals of the community. Below this ranking is palm wine taping which ranked the lowest. In the community, there are families that have it as their "trademark". Further analysis of the nature of occupation shows that more than half of the members of the groups engage in more than one occupation.

The educational background of members of the groups, Table 1<sup>4</sup> shows that majority of them do not have formal education at all. The twenty-three groups have members that fall into that category. Those with educational level ranging from primary 1-6 appeared in twenty two of the twenty three groups. The educational qualification of West African School Certificate (WASC) was indicated by only eight groups. Above situation shows the low level of education among the members of the various groups.

One the language used in the discussion as indicated on table 1<sup>5</sup> Igbo language dominated all the discussions. English Language was used occasionally by some members who had problem with the use of Igbo to properly explain themselves. What the facilitator/researcher did here was to ensure that somebody in the group explained the questions to the understanding of every body present. Apart from Igbo language and sometimes-English language, no other language featured in the course of discussion. The range of the number of children by members of the group is shown on Table 1<sup>6</sup>. It show that more members of the group have total number of children in the ranges of 7-8, and 9 and above.

TABLE 2  
PARTICIPANT View On The Sources of Information Available In A Rural Community  
FOCUS GROUP

SOURCES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1 Local chief	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
2 Priest	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
3 Parent	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
4 Radio	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
5 News/letter	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
6 Seminar	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
7 Senior Relation	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
8 Visitor	E	/	E	E	E	E	/	/	/	/	/	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
9 Age Grade	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
10 Agricultural Extension workers	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
11 Local School Teacher	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
12 Ministry of Information	E	/	E	E	E	E	E	/	/	/	/	E	/	E	E	E	E	/	/	/	E	/	E
13 Rural development Worker	/	/	/	E	E	/	/	E	E	E	/	/	/	/	/	/	E	/	/	/	/	/	/
14 Local Councilor	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/

KEY:  
I - INTERNAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION  
E-EXTERNAL SOURCE OF INFORMATION



### **Information Sources Available in Okuku**

To determine information sources available in Okuku focus group discussion (FGO) was used to collect data from the people. The data collected on participation views on the sources of information available in the rural community is presented in table 1.

From the table, the sources of information in the community are divided into two, information sources from within each community and information generated outside the community.

The information sources from within Okuku community include the local chief, the local priests and parents and parents. Older relations who have lived in cities but have retired to rural areas are also sources of information.

The representatives of the people in the local government councils generate much information for development of the people. The people see them as a reliable source because of their position as the people's representatives. "When we hear it from the mouth of our people we know it is the truth and nothing but the truth" remarked Nze Boniface Ogbuechi. Other sources identified by participants in the focus group discussions include meetings.

The people identified as sources of information generated within Okuku community serve as keepers of community news and messages, hence all the sources are required as authentic, competent and reliable. One of the community leaders interviewed identified three main source of communication in the community and showed how they are used for development communication process. According to elder Mbah, one of the respondents: "The age grade or paramount leaders of the community and his council may identify a community problem that demand a community solution".

### **External Sources of Information**

Apart from the information sources generated internally there are other sources generated outside the community. The following external information sources available to the rural community were also identified. They include mass media, government, information ministries, agricultural extension workers, community development officers and rural health personnel. Information on health matters reaches the people mainly through hospital and rural health centers. This is in consonance with the findings of Aboyade (1990:37) that efforts are made on some clinic days by health sisters and nurses to give health instruction. The health workers in a group identified that there was a problem with rural health personnel as a source of information in the rural communities. According to them, information activities would depend on the existence of health centers in a particular community. It is only when we have health center

with health workers that we can talk of information from them". The respondents argued further that this is restricted to special clinic days and that only those who have cause to attend the clinic." They only tell us something when we go to the clinic".

Another source of information, which is generated from outside the vicinity, is the community development workers. These groups of workers are categorized as change-agents and their relationship with the people is very tense. The intensity of their relationship with the rural people is a function of the nature of their work. They interact with the people in their occupation, way of living or social life. The aim of these change-agents is to encourage the voluntary participation of the people themselves in all efforts to improve their own initiative. The information available through this source facilitates development communication process in the rural community of Okuku, with the attendant suspicion.

The agricultural extension worker has been identified in this study as the most important external source of information to rural people. From the data collected from development agencies, agricultural extension workers bring information about improved farm practices derived from various agricultural researchers. This source of information touches directly on the major means of livelihood in rural areas. The activities of these sources of information are more prevalent and noticeable than other group of change-agents. Some of those in the discussion narrated how they were encouraged to use fertilizer and pesticides. The result of the activities of the agricultural extension worker as source of information in Okuku community is increase in agricultural production and their income earning thereby making it possible for them to solve their economic problems.

Other external sources of information in the community are the government ministries of information. Some of the workers in the ministry and local government council in the group discussion agreed that government has been making effort through its ministry of information to make available information to the people at the grass-roots. The respondents regard the ministry of information as a major information source in the rural communities. Tracing the role of the ministry as a source of information, they said that in 1976, Federal Information Centers, (F.I.C.) an off-shoot of Federal public Enlightenment Centers, were established in all the state capitals of Nigeria, with the primary aim of transmitting events to the public at the grass-root level and enlightening them on federal Government activities and policy programs. They were also to transmit to the federal government people's reaction in form of feedback. It was from this, that the ministry of information emerged to continue with the role of the center as a source of information to the rural areas.

### The Procedure and Potentials of Internal Sources of Information

It may take the Eze himself or any member of his cabinet to raise the issue, at the point of which serious thoughts, debates and articulations would be demanded to fine-tune and examine the issues, other village heads, clan heads etc. would be invited into the discussion. This source of communication is familiar to the people.

A second source of local information may be the village heads or the village elders whose ideas must go through to the community leaders. If the ideas are sustained and accepted, they will await the next stage in the process.

A third source of information internally generated in community programmes is one of the many community self-help associations scattered in almost all large towns and cities with their headquarters in Okuku. Some of these associations include:

Okuku Development Union, Avengers Club, Uborji, Okuku Uborji Youths, Uborji Central/ Family Meeting, Obogwu Central /Family Meeting, Umudkirie Central/Family Meeting, Mgbolo Central/Family Meeting Amapu Central/Family Meeting

All youth's associations clubs in all the villages. The above associations have their umbrella groups based in the rural community from where most of the policies emanate. The Umbrella associations meet once a year, usually at Christmas periods with representative of affiliated groups from the cities. In recent times, some of these associations like Uhoji Central meet twice a year, during the Ihuji festival and during Christmas. It is at this yearly or bi-yearly get together that ideas are shared, needs examined and proposed solutions evaluated.

The umbrella group may decide, for example, to commence the construction of a hospital complex in the community in order to improve community health. This proposed construction of a health - care facility is communicated to the chief of the community, who is mandated to consider the idea with his council member and decide on a site for the project.

After a project has been considered by one of these sources mentioned in Table 2, it is most likely to be accepted by one the community leaders, elders and representatives of villages and clans. This facilitates internally generated rural development process, because the source is familiar and local to the people.

On the opinion of rural development workers on how development information in rural areas can be improved, it has also been shown that indigenous information sources are generally ignored in development

TABLE 3

Participant Views On the Potentials of the Sources of Information Available in the Rural Area of Okuku Community

SOURCES

FOCUS GROUP

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1 Local chief	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
2 Priest	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
3 Parent	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
4 Radio	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
5 Newsletter	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6 Seminar	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7 Senior Relation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
8 Visitor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
9 Age-Grade	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
10 Agricultural Extension workers	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
11 Local School Teacher	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
12 Ministry of Information	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+
13 Rural development Worker	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
14 Local Councillor	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

KEY: + APPLICABLE  
- NOT APPLICABLE

information process. The result of this has been the non-involvement of rural people in the planning and implementation of rural development programmes. It is therefore the opinion of most of the rural development workers that information sources, which are local chiefs, Age-grades and priests, should not be ignored in information dissemination for rural development.

### Conclusion

Information for rural development abounds from various sources in Okuku.

The sources include the local chief, the local priest, parent, senior relations, village headmasters, the local councilors, acquaintances from the meeting of age grade or community meeting teachers these people who serve as gate-keepers of village are regarded as authentic, competent and reliable source of news. Apart from information generated within the community, information from outside the community reaches the people through a variety of sources including the mass media, government information ministry agricultural extension workers, social welfare development agents and with rural health centers. However, people respond to these exogenous sources with suspicious, close-mindedness, alienation and hostility as they see them as unfamiliar, alien to the indigenous system of sourcing information which has taken root. It is hereby recommended that development agents should make use of indigenous channel to ensure high level of acceptability by rural dwellers.

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