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CONTENTS

- BOOK REVIEW AS AN INDISPENSABLE SELECTION AID FOR COLLECTION
DEVELOPMENT IN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES
BY SALIMATU K. GARBA 1
- AN ASSESSMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE GRADUATES IN
NIGERIAN ESTABLISHMENTS
BY TIJJANI ABUBAKAR, Ph.D 7
- THE PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UTILIZATION FOR
GRASSROOT MOBILIZATION IN AN INDIGENOUS IGBO SOCIETY OF NIGERIA
BY EVEREST C. MADU, Ph.D 22
- SECURITY AND CRIME CONTROL OF LIBRARY MATERIALS IN UNIVERSITY LI-
BRARIES: A CASE STUDY OF ABUBAKAR TAFAWA BALEWA UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY, BAUCHI.
BY ADAMU YUSUF ABDULLAHI 32
- LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS
BY SAKA KATAMBA ABUBAKAR AND ABUBAKAR MOHAMMED ABDULLAHI 39
- THE STATUS OF INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) IN UNI-
VERSITY LIBRARIES IN WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES
BY ROSE LADE MOMMOH 45
- NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA AND PROBLEMS OF DEPOSIT OBLIGATIONS:
A WAY FORWARD
NASSIR BELLO, Ph.D 53
- MEDIA RESOURCES CENTRE AS A TOOL FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHING
BY VERONICA AMIOSION K. SADO 58
- ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL FACILITIES AND READER'S SATISFACTION: A CASE
STUDEY OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY MINNA LIBRARY
BY G. U. OYEDUM 67
- PART-TIME STUDENTS' LIBRARY USE PATTERN: COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
EKIADOLOR'S EXPERIENCE
BY MATILDA E. AMADASU 76

**THE PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UTILIZATION FOR
GRASSROOT MOBILIZATION IN AN INDIGENOUS
IGBO SOCIETY OF NIGERIA
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Abstract

This study examined appropriate information policy information policy for Grassroots mobilization with focus on an indigenous setting of an Igbo society of Nigeria. Specifically the paper looked at peculiar information problems that militate against the use of information technology for mobilization and development in a traditional setting. The method of data collection was anthropologically grounded. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used in this study to collect data from the people. The choice of focus Group Discussion is because they are excellent for obtaining information from predominantly illiterate communities. The data collected were analysed quantitatively it has been revealed that problems such as capital, manpower, lack of exposure infrastructure, socio-cultural problems militate against the use of information technology in a traditional setting

Introduction

The use of information technology in information has had a pervasive impact on the way societies are presently organized (Madu, 2002).such impact has greatly revolutionalised information delivery which in turn has impacted positively on the ways societies are administered.

However before the advent of information technology. Africans and indeed African societies have had in place indigenous information systems which also help them in the organization and sustenance of these societies. However, according to Madu (2002), these African indigenous information systems have problems which limit their potential for efficient and effective grass root mobilization. The identified problems according to him include low level of technology, lack of beaucratic structure, limited scope and area of coverage, complexity in the indigenous media, which makes it difficult for the rural development agents to take advantage of them to mobilize the grass root.

With advance in technology the use of information technology for grass root mobilization especially in the African societies is a welcome development as its ability to conquer time; distance and space cannot be overemphasized.

Statement of the Problem

There is no doubt that information technology has come with its benefit of effective and efficient information delivery

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also produces up-to-date information which can be utilized for development in rural areas, the government laudable programmes for the betterment of the lives of the rural dwellers can be accurately and precisely delivered. For instance, information technology could also be used to communicate health information on how the rural people can take advantage of education opportunity, like scholarships subsidy in WAEC and NECO fees. The rural farmer could also be informed on the use of fertilizer and how to increase yields information on family planning, birth control, house keeping and maintenance can also be communicated to the rural women with the use of information technology. The success of all in no doubt impact positively on the lives of the rural dwellers. However, studies have shown that despite the efforts and good intentions government in private sector to maximize the use of information technology for grass root mobilization, nothing can actually be shown for it. In view of the above therefore, what is the problem of the use of information technology for grass root mobilization. This is the focus of attention of this study as it addresses a case study of an indigenous Igbo society in Nigeria.

Review of relevant literature

Information technology according to Marshall (1984) is the coming together of computing and telecommunications for the purpose of handling information. This coming together or merging has been made possible by recent developments in microelectronics. At root, the merger is possible because modern communication systems and computers represent information in the same way, so that whether information is being communicated by a telecommunication or manipulated by a computer, its representation is the same. It is this combination of telecommunication and computer that makes it possible for an individual or a company to meet all their information related needs rapidly and easily. Looking at the concept of information technology from another angle, Okunji(199) defines Marghalama as of the view that information technology is a term which encompasses the notion of the application of technologies to information handling. This includes generation, storage, processing, retrieval and dissemination etc. In another perspective, Ayo (2001) identified three basic components of information technology. These components include:

- (a) Electronic processing using the computer
- (b) Transmission of information using telecommunication
- (c) Equipment
- (d) Dissemination of information in multimedia.

Information technology can be summarized simply as "the acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of vocal, textual, pictorial and numerical information by a microelectronic-based combination of computer and telecommunication". The above definition was given by department of trade and industry as quoted by Lucey(1997). On development communication, Kebede (1992) in his study of health project in Ethiopia argued that in national development, the efforts made by government activities and also help to achieve the desired good. He concluded thus: If different media are properly and wisely used to strengthen grass root communication, they can make a substantial contribution to development in general and population education in particular. Writing on new communication technologies in rural development, Domatob, Ausmus and Butter (1996) argue that they are fast displacing the indigenous communication devices in Africa. They maintain that they come with mixed blessing and could be used to promote development in the area of health, education, agriculture, entertainment, business, tourism etc.

They however warn that these new technologies might accentuate the gap between the rich and the poor, creating a society characterized by an information-rich elites and information poor under-class. In his own contribution, Postman (1993) maintains that New communication technologies may impact faster or hinder development. Every technology is both a burden and a blessing, not either, or but this and that.

He suggested that despite the limitations, these technologies are crucial to socio-economic and political advancement in Africa

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is the identification of the problems that militate against the use of information technology for grass root mobilization for development. Other objectives include:

- (i) The extent of involvement of rural dwellers in the planning and execution of rural development programmes that directly affect them
- (ii) The extent of use of information technology for mobilization of rural people for development
- (c) The problem hindering the use of information technology for grassroot mobilization
- (d) The effect of culture on the use of information technology for rural development.

Methodology

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was used to collect data for this study. Basically this involved a group discussion that gathered people together from similar background and experience to discuss topics central to the objective of this study.

Focus groups were conveniently homogeneous, that participants were recruited to par-

ticular groups on the basis of some common characteristics, to maximize discussion within the group and to avoid a situation where individuals dominate or withdraw because of differences in class, sex, age, experiences and acquired knowledge. 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 from the constraint typical of one to one interview and ensured that they expressed their views openly and spontaneously.

The settings of the discussion on this research were in neutral and natural settings. For instance, market square and community school compounds were used as venues. The researcher allows for insufficient time for the recruitment of members of the group. Also the time of sessions (data and hour) was appropriate and convenient to the members. The size of the groups range from 5-15. The researcher also acted as the facilitator and 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 question/discussion guide which had earlier been prepared. The discussion guide used in this study was based on the objectives of the study.

In this study, the facilitator/researcher was ably assisted by a note taker/recorder. The following materials/instruments were made available for the exercise: tape recorder, cassettes, papers, pencils, biro etc. The note taker took notes during the session and recorded the discussions. He was able to retain the impressions and information given by members of the groups.

In most of the sessions, entertainments were provided for the members of the groups. This in no small way encouraged them and shows that the researcher is appreciative of their time and energy in participating. This research chose Focus Group Discussions (FGD) for data collection in line with the following reasons as given by Dawson et al (1993)

- (a) they produce information far more quickly and at less cost than individual interviews
- (b) they are excellent for obtaining information from predominantly illiterate communities
- (c) because the questions are flexible, it is easy to discover attitudes and opinions that might not be revealed in survey questionnaire
- (d) they are usually well accepted by the community as they make use of the group discussion which is a form of communication found naturally in most communities

Question Guide

- (a) Do you see any problem in the use of information technology for development communication in the rural areas?
- (b) What are the natures of these problems?

- (d) Are you always involved in the planning and execution of rural development programmes that directly affect your life?
Do you think that effective mobilization of rural people for participation in development programmes will enhance the success of such programmes?
- (e) What suggestion will you like to give rural development workers in the use of information technology for mobilization at the grassroots?

Characteristics of the Group

Table 1: Characteristics of Members of the Groups

1	SIZE OF THE GROUP	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
5-7	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+-	+	-	-	-
8-9	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	-	-
10-12	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
13-15	+	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	AGE	25-30														
31-40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	-
41-50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-
51-60	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	++	-	+	-
61-65	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	OCCUPATION															
Farming	+	+	+	+	++	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Teaching	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
Petty Trading	-	+	-	-	+	++	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+	-
P. Wine Taping	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hunting	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+
4	EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION															
Below Primary 1+	-	+	+	++	+	+	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Primary 1-6	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	++	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	+
WASC	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
Above WASC	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
5	LANGUAGES															
Igbo	+	++	+	+	+	+	++	+	+	+	++	+	+	-	-	+
English	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
6	NUMBER OF CHILDREN															
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 the group does not fall into the category)

A look at the size of the groups as shown on Table 1, shows that of the fifteen groups, the composition of majority of the groups renege between 10-12 as seven groups fall into that category. This is followed by groups of between 8-9 category.

The category of between 13-14 members had three groups while only one group had as low as 5-7 members. This small group is not unconnected with the very young age of the member as very few youths occupy the position of tradition and leaders who are the focus of the study.

As for the age of the members of the groups, it has also shown from table 1(2) that in most of the groups, participants were between the age ranges 65-75.

As for the age range involved in the group discussions, it appears 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.

Elderly members of the community were seen as more resourceful because of their age and experience and wisdom that go with it.

The other characteristic of members of the group is occupation. Table 1(3) 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 II teachers. Ranking below teaching is hunting which is one of the traditional festivals of the community. Below this ranking is palm wine tapping which ranked the lowest. In the community, there are families that have it as their "family mark". Further analysis of the nature of the occupation shows that more than half of the members of the group engaged in more than one occupation.

The educational background of members of the groups (Table 1(4)) shows that majority of them do not have formal educational at all. The fifteen groups have members that fall into category. Those with educational level ranging from primary 1-6 appeared in all the groups. The educational qualification of West African School Certificate (WASC) was indicated by only five groups; only five of the groups have members that fall into the category of those above WASC shows the low level of education among members of the various groups.

On the language used in discussion as indicated on Table 1(5), Igbo language dominated. English language was used occasionally by some members who have 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 everybody present. Apart from Igbo language and sometimes English language, no other language featured in the course of the discussion. The range of number of children by members of the group is shown on Table 1 (6) which show that more members of the groups have total number of children in the ranges of 7-8, and 9 and above.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 2: Participants Views on the Problems Militating Against the Use of Information Technology for Development Communication

Table 2: Participants Views on the Problems Militating Against the Use of Information Technology for Development Communication

Problems	Group														
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Capital Intensive	+	+	++	++	++	++	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
2. Lack of Exposure	+		-	-	-	-	+	+	++	+	+	+	+	+	+
3. Alien		+	++	++	++	++	+	+	++	+	+	+	+	+	+
4. Socio-Cultural		+	++	++	++	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	-	+
5. Manpower Probl.		+	++	++	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+
6. Suspicion		+	++	++	++	+	+	++	+	++	+	+	+	+	+
7. Low Level of Infrastructure		+	+	+	+	-	+	+	++	+	+	+	+	-	-
8. Literacy		+	+	+	+	++	+	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
9. Geographical Isolation		+	+	-	-	+	+	++	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
10. Attitude of the Town Crier															
11. Attitude of Local Union Leaders		-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	+	+
12. Political Instability			++	-	+	++	+	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+

Key: + Identified as a problem by a member in that group
 - Not identified as a problem by a member in that group

The respondents were asked to identify and describe the problems they encountered in the use information technology for the development of communication. One of the problems identified by the respondents is that information technology is capital intensive. This problem ranked highest as about 96% of the respondents indicated it. They indicated that it is difficult embarking a successful internet business without sufficient capital. With this problem, it becomes very difficult if not impossible for most rural communities to enjoy the resources available on the internet. Closely following the above problem is the issue of manpower. This ranked second as about 91% of the respondents indicated it. They are of the opinion that there is shortage of trained manpower in many developing countries and rural areas are worse hit. Even when information technology is acquired, without skilled manpower, the equipment cannot do much without training in the use of the equipment. It was also revealed that

requent changes in information technologies have not helped matters as those who are trained before will need retaining to remain relevant.

Coming third in the problem faced by rural dwellers in the use of information technology for development communication is the problem of infrastructure. Among the infrastructure identified, power outages ranked highest. They argue that without electricity, the equipment cannot be operated. In most of the rural communities, electricity supply is non-existent. Where they exist they are epileptic. The power failure not only disrupts the use of these information technologies, it can cause damage to the equipments. Another problem that militates against the use of information technology for development communication in the rural areas is the socio-cultural problem. The respondents ranked this fourth with about 86% indicating it. Most African people especially those in the rural areas are still attached to their cultures. In most cases, the culture of the people is diametrically opposed to this new idea of information dissemination called information technology. Moreover, they see it as an alien culture which could be an instrument of re-colonization. The result of all these is lack of interest by many people in the rural areas in the use of the new technology.

The problem of political instability ranked fifth. About 71% of the respondent indicated this. They indicated that frequently changes in government bring about changes in development programmes and policies. These changes in policy affect not only the administration but also infrastructures, some of which are very relevant for successful implementation of a policy that supports information technology especially in the rural areas. "Without infrastructure we can do nothing"

Another problem indicated by about 60% of the respondents is the problem of lack of exposure on the part of the rural dwellers. Most of the rural dwellers reside in the villages without interacting with their counterparts in the urban areas. This lack of interaction between them and the urban dwellers who are apparently more informed in the use of information technology is a problem.

Also indicated by about 42% of the respondents is the problem of the attitude of the local union leaders. In most cases the union leaders allow their personal preferences to influence the community's attitude towards any government policy. The result is that the union leaders are not in support of any policy, the rural dwellers follow suit and vice versa.

Conclusion

In this study the respondents were able to identify seven basic problems that militate against the use of information utilization for the grassroots mobilization. These include the capital intensive nature of information technology, the problem of manpower, problem of infrastructure, socio-culture problems. Others are problem associated with frequent changes in government, problem of lack of exposure and the problems that have to do with the attitude of local union leaders.

Rural development workers used in this study corroborated the opinion of the rural dwellers on the use of information technology. Findings on them show that none of the rural development workers has any formal training in the use of information technology.

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