

AN EVALUATIVE STUDY OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION NEEDS OF RURAL WOMEN IN RIJAU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF NIGER STATE

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Abstract

The study examined the evaluative study of socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau Local Government area of Niger State. Questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection and simple percentage distribution was used to analyze the data collected. The study showed the socio-economic information needs of rural women include information on raw materials such as the cost, quality, location, source and dealers/seller, how to obtain loan, cooperative societies and government assistance to artisans, new products, latest/current designs and procedure for production, how to market their products, Information on health such as personal hygiene, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and family planning, political issues, government policies, laws and human rights, information on processing and preservation of agricultural produce, information on how to apply improve seeds and information on Mechanization. The study recommended that government should as a matter of emergency provide rural women in Rijau local government with information materials, creating mass literacy programme, improving accessibility and availability of information materials, orientation about the use of library, reducing cost of information materials, increasing capital to finance their business, good storage facilities, construction of good roads and educating them on how to market their goods to get good price.

Keywords: Socio-economic information needs, Information seeking, Rural women, Literacy programme

Introduction

The main objective of information need and socio-economic society is to empower all the people through access to and use of information, but there is concern that some people, including rural women, are more distant than others from the information in the day-to-day affairs which cannot be over-emphasized. The socio-economic information needs of a society is where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life (Badamasi & Francis, 2019). Studies have revealed that the quality of information has a way of shaping how information seekers prioritize the variety of information available to them. This is closely related to factors such as ease in use, accessibility and preference of source of information which can possibly influence decision making.

Information is an important tool used in the realization of any objective or goal set by Individuals. It is a valuable resource required in any society, thus acquiring and using Information is critical and important activities. It is also man's related knowledge in all subjects in all forms and from all sources, which will help users to make rational decisions. The rural women need critical information to meet their information needs to enhance their productivity in the aspect of social and economic activities. For this study, information may be described as the working tools and empowerment for a change that will lead to enhancement in productivity for the rural women, if properly packaged and disseminated (Ogbonna & Osuchukwu, 2014). To understand information need, it is necessary to understand the context of human needs that created the need for information. Information users need information for problem solving, current awareness, and recreational purposes and for up-dating of their knowledge. Information need is construed in the sense of data or a set of data specially required that will enable the user to make an appropriate decision on any related problem facing him or her at any particular time (Annune, Ezeani & Okafor, 2014). In the same vain, Case (2009) described information need as an individual's or group's desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need. However, Ekoja (2010) explained that information needs are the information, which information seekers require to conduct their businesses and live their daily lives. The identification of information needs of a person will lead to the means of seeking for that information.

Women's education and empowerment have been important in social, economic, and political issues in the developing countries like Nigeria and over the past three decades Nigeria has made impressive gains in these areas (Ukachi, 2011). Women are now participating in family decision making as well as in national and international socio-economic and political development. Women, irrespective of location, need information on family health, food and nutrition, family planning, agriculture, how to do different business and child education. Like any other group in the society, women empowerment is an important concept in socio-economic and national development. One of the United Nations conventions supports the empowerment of women in the area of women's human rights according to Beijing Platform of Action 1996. Beyond this; one of the eight cardinal programs of Millennium Goal Development Goals recognizes empowerment of women. Rural women make significant contributions to the economy, thus they need information for survival and to develop their businesses (Ukachi, 2011).

The information needs of people depend on various factors such as education, profession, age, gender, region, socio-economic condition, religion, even weather. Ukachi (n.d.) stated that information needs of an individual or group of individual's depends highly on the work activities of such an individual or group of individuals, e.g., doctors need information on the treatment of sicknesses, while farmers need information on agriculture. However, the rural women do not have specific information need like doctors and farmers rather, they individually have different information needs based on their work activities. The family situations led rural women to seek information included health, agriculture, employment, family violence, and basic needs for the family (Mooko, 2005). Women's information needs on personal, religious, social, domestic, professional or medical care are an important factor in determining the quality of life they live, their output professionally or socially, at home and to the world generally (Aina 2004). Momodu (2002) carried out a study on information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in Nigeria. He identified women information needs. The women particularly needed information on pre and post-natal care and current immunization facilities for their children and

themselves. For instance women are basically involved in trading, full-time housekeeping, artisanship, as well as other activities in the informal sector of the economy; they need information that will mobilize their status and improve their lot. Abdulkareem (2010) reiterates that information is even more important to the women group because of the fact that women constitute the larger portion of the adult population in the world and also because of the roles they play in the lives of other categories of people (such as children, men, youths, etc.) in the population. Women are regarded as key to the development of any nation; an adequately-informed woman affects the lives of people around her.

According to Ezema (2016) the importance of information to human development and empowerment cannot be over emphasized, because information has become a supportive input of any development programme. Thus, it can be said that information, if well-articulated, could eradicate ignorance and provide enlightenment on how to achieve economic, educational, social, political and cultural objectives. It has been observed that having access to the right kind of information can address the major problems of ignorance and poverty of ideas that hinder the empowerment of individuals. Daudu & Mohammed (2013) corroborates this assertion by reporting that people who are well informed are able to respond appropriately to the demands of their environment. It also strengthens their social networks. Women participation in socio-economic activities is not a new phenomenon, the socio-economic activities in which women are involved vary and they are also subsistence in nature; such activities include farming, fishing, hairdressing, black-smiting, bead making and trading, among others. Such activities need to be upgraded to improve women's income-earning base.

The most suitable sources of information are audio-visual and interpersonal communication, which include radio, television, trade association age group association village drums, town criers and wrestling, folk media, participatory video, churches, friends relatives, and photograph etc. According to Etebu (2009) oral communication pattern is the most available source of information in African traditional setting, in almost all rural communities, town criers and their activities are highly respectable. They use wooden or metal gongs or drums to stir up the people and deliver their messages orally. Another means of oral provision of information is holding meetings. Most villages and town have squares where the people meet to discuss issues and make decision. Through this means the leaders provide information for their wellbeing and development. This oral exchange of information indicates that rural dwellers have different sources of meeting their information needs (Saleh & Lasisi, 2011).

The factors that act as challenge to information accessibility and utilization as opined by Igwe (2012) include the following; language, illiteracy, geographical distance, lack of infrastructure and ignorance. Garba (2017) revealed in her study that there are many factors militating against the effective provision and utilization of information for economic empowerment of rural women. These factors include lack of social infrastructure (good roads, electricity, communication network etc.).

Statement of the Problem

Women no matter their locations, situations and social-economic status have been known to engage in various human activities which have wide-ranging consequences on improvement of their living standard and the development of the society. Rural women as a matter of reference play key roles in agricultural production and marketing of agricultural product, they have also

been count with the initiation and implementation of policies and program that have helped in no small measure towards the development of the society at large. Giving the women’s vital roles in the society, they need information on areas like family health, food and nutrition family planning and child education, agricultural and animal husbandry and employment. Women’s information needs: personal, religious, social domestic, professional and medical are important factors in determining the quality of life they live; their level of productivity and success in any human endeavors.

Today, preliminary investigation on the socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local Government area of Niger state revealed that they are not getting adequate information for their socio-economic needs and has negatively affected their socio-economic activities. Could it be that some factors such as illiteracy, poverty, poor communication, inadequate power supply and government inability to provide some basic social amenities to the rural areas that is the cause of the problem. It is at the backdrop that the researcher decided to investigate on the socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local government area of Niger state.

Research Questions

1. What are their socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local government?
2. What are the information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women in Rijau local government?
3. What are the challenges encountered in seeking information needs by rural women in Rijau local government?

Methodology

The study adopted Survey research of descriptive nature. The populations of this study consisted of two hundred and twenty rural women namely: Twenty (20) Darangi ward, twenty (20) Rijau ward, twenty (20) Tungan Magajiya ward, twenty (20) Dukku ward, twenty (20) Sabongari Ushe ward, twenty (20) Dugge ward, twenty (20) Bunu ward, twenty (20) Sahoma/Jamaare ward, twenty (20) Genu ward, twenty (20) Shambo ward and twenty (20) Warari ward. Questionnaire and observation were the data collection instruments. The target respondents consists of rural women in because they are believed to be in the best position to give best responses to the items on the research questions. Descriptive statistical tools such as simple percentages, tables and charts were used to analyze the data. Out of the 220 (100%) respondents, 170 (77%) of the respondents were duly filled and returned.

Results

Research Question One: what are the socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local government?

Table 1: Score responses of the needs for the socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local government.

S/No	Statements	Number of respondents	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never	Percentage (%)
A	Information on raw materials such as the cost, quality,	170	40(24%)	120(71%)	10(5%)		100%

B	location, source and dealers/seller Information on financial matters such as how to obtain loan, cooperative societies and government assistance to artisans.	170	45(26%)	125(74%)			100%
C	Information on new products, latest/current designs and procedure for production.	170	80(47%)	65(38%)	20(12%)	5(3%)	100%
D	Information on how to market their products	170	75(44%)	70(41%)	25(15%)		100%
E	Information on health such as personal hygiene, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and family planning.	170	90(53%)	55(32%)	15(9%)	10(6%)	100%
G	Information on political issues, government policies, laws and human rights	170	60(35%)	80(47%)	20(12%)	10(6%)	100%
	information on processing	170	60(35%)	80(47%)	20(12%)	10(6%)	100%

and preservation of agricultural produce information on how to apply improve seeds	170	90(53%)	55(32%)	15(9%)	10(6%)	100%
Mechanization	170	40(24%)	120(71%)	10(5%)		100%

Table 1 above shows the responses of the socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau local government. From the table, the responses such as information on raw materials such as the cost, quality, location, source and dealers/seller 160(95%), information on financial matters such as how to obtain loan, cooperative societies and government assistance to artisans 170(100%), Information on new products, latest/current designs and procedure for production 145(85%) Information on how to market their products 145(85%), Information on health such as personal hygiene, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and family planning 145(85%), Information on political issues, government policies, laws and human rights 140(82%), information on processing and preservation of agricultural produce 140(82%), information on how to apply improve seeds 145(85%), Mechanization 160(95%)

Research Question Two: What are the information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women in Rijau Local Government area in Niger State?

Table 2: Views /responses on information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women in Rijau Local Government area in Niger State.

S/No	Statements	Number of respondents	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never	Percentage (%)
A	I ask the executives and other members of my association for the information I need	170	85(50%)	60(35%)	20(12%)	5(3%)	100%
B	I listen to radio and watch television in order to get the information	170	65(38%)	90(53%)	15(9%)		100%

C	I ask my friends and relatives for it.	170	50(29%)	95(56%)	10(6%)	15(9%)	100%
D	I visit churches or mosques and ask for the information	170	70(41%)	90(53%)	10(6%)		100%
E	I go to local government, the palace or ask NGOs for the information	170	90(53%)	50(29%)	20(12%)	10(6%)	100%
F	I send somebody to search and get the information for me	170	40(24%)	60(35%)	50(29%)	10(6%)	100%
G	Through the village head	170	90(53%)	60(35%)	15(9%)	5(3%)	100%

Table 2 above shows the responses/views of information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women in Rijau Local Government area in Niger State, from the table, the statements such as I ask the executives and other members of my association for the information I need 145(85%), I listen to radio and watch television in order to get the information 155(91%), I ask my friends and relatives for it 145(85%), supporting research by both the students and staff 160(94%) , I visit churches or mosques and ask for the information 140(82%), I go to local government, the palace or ask NGOs for the information 100(59%), I send somebody to search and get the information for me 150((88%), Through the village head 150 (88%).

Research Question 3: What are the challenges encountered by rural women in seeking their information needs in Rijau Local Government in Niger State?

Table 3: Responses/views on the challenges encounter by rural women in seeking their information needs in Rijau Local Government in Niger State.

S/No	Statements	Number of respondents	Very often	Often	Occasionally	Never	Percentage %
A	Lack of information materials to meet their needs	170	50(29%)	80(47%)	30(18%)	10(6%)	100%
B	Non-awareness of mass literacy programme	170	85(50%)	65(38%)		20(12%)	100%
C	Inaccessibility and unavailability of information materials	170	50(29%)	67(39%)	40(24%)	13(8%)	100%
D	Non-orientation /ignorance about the use of library	170	40(24%)	50(29%)	50(29%)	20(12%)	100%
E	Cost of information materials	170	45((26%)	64(38%)	56(33%)	5(3%)	100%
F	inadequate capital to finance their business	170	90(53%)	50(29%)	20(9%)	10(6%)	100%
G	lack of good storage facilities	170	85(50%)	65(38%)		20(12%)	100%
H	lack of good roads	170	90(53%)	50(29%)	20(9%)	10(6%)	100%
I	lack of knowledge on how to market their goods to get good price	170	85(50%)	65(38%)		20(12%)	100%

Table 3 shows the responses of rural women on the challenges encounter by rural women in seeking their information needs in Rijau Local Government in Niger State, from the table, the responses from the respondents such as Lack of information materials to meet their needs 130(76%), Non-awareness of mass literacy programme 150(88%), Inaccessibility and unavailability of information materials 117(68%), Non-orientation /ignorance about the use of library 90(53%), Cost of information materials 109(64%), inadequate capital to finance their business 140(82%), lack of good storage facilities 150 (88%), lack of good roads 140 (82%), lack of knowledge on how to market their goods to get good price 150 (88%).

Discussion of Findings

The responses of the respondents that is 82% and above agreed that there is need socio-economic information for rural women in Rijau local government for effective economic activities. This finding corroborates that of Momodu (2002) who found out that information needs of rural women in Nigeria include: information on pre and post-natal care and current immunization facilities for their children and themselves, trading, full-time housekeeping, artisanship, as well as other activities in the informal sector of the economy.

Majority of the responses from the respondents that is 59% and above also agreed that the information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women have boosted their socio-economic activities in Rijau Local Government area in Niger State. This finding corroborates that of Arman and Shariful (2012) who found out that the information seeking behaviour in Bangladesh include: television, radio, newspaper, NGOs, field worker and personal experience

On the issues of challenges almost all the responses from the respondents agreed that the mentioned challenges encounter by rural women in seeking for their information needs has negatively affected the socio-economic activities in Rijau Local Government in Niger State. These challenges has affected them in terms of effective participation of economic activities and service delivery. This findings corroborates that of Igwe (2012) who revealed in their study that many factors militating against the effective provision and utilization of information for economic empowerment of rural women which include: Language, illiteracy, geographical distance, lack of infrastructures and ignorance.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study on the evaluative study of socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau Local Government area of Niger State. The study showed that there are many socio-economic information needs of rural women which include information on raw materials such as the cost, quality, location, source and dealers/seller, information on how to obtain loan, cooperative societies and government assistance to artisans, information on new products, latest/current designs and procedure for production, information on how to market their products, Information on health such as personal hygiene, food and nutrition, housekeeping, child care and information on family planning, political issues, government policies, laws and human rights, information on processing and preservation of agricultural produce, information on how to apply improve seeds and information on mechanization for effective economic activities. The study also revealed that there are many information seeking behaviour and sources of rural women which include asking the executives and other members of my association for the information, listen to radio and watch television in order to get the information, asking my friends and relatives information, supporting research by both the students and staff, visiting churches or

mosques and asking for the information, going to local government, the palace or asking NGOs for the information we needs, sending somebody to search and get the information, getting information through the village head which have boosted their socio-economic activities in Rijau Local Government area in Niger State.

Recommendations

In line with the above statements from the respondents on the evaluative study of socio-economic information needs of rural women in Rijau Local Government area of Niger State. The study recommended the followings:

1. Creating awareness of mass literacy programme by government, increase accessibility and availability of information materials to rural women by government
2. Creating orientation programmes about importance on the use of library in getting information reducing cost of information materials, increase access to capital by government to finance rural women business
3. Provision of good storage facilities by government, construction of good roads and educating rural women on how to market their goods to get good price by the government especially the local government which is closer to them.

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