INFORMATION BEHAVIOUR OF NIGERIAN WOMEN LIVING IN RURAL AREAS TOWARDS SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT - WHAT DO WOMEN WANT, WHAT SHOULD WOMEN WANT?

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Abstract
Like any other groups in the society, women empowerment is an important concept in socio-economic development. This study investigated the information behaviour of women living in rural communities. Interviews were conducted with 56 women who were conveniently selected. Findings reveal that the women wanted socio-economic empowerment, and needed various types of information, but mainly information related to their occupations, health and family care. They used interpersonal sources, especially their husbands. The level of adoption of ICTs among them was very low, as few had mobile phones, which were mainly basic phones used to make voice calls. Some of the women wanted to be socio-economically empowered but were not aware of the role information can play to facilitate empowerment. The study recommends the provision of information resources and technologies for the women because access to information can play a very important role in achieving women's socio-economic empowerment.
Keywords: Information need, information seeking, Nigeria, rural women, socio-economic empowerment.

Introduction

The position of women and their status in the society is often an index of development. In recent years, women are no longer confined to traditional gender roles of wives and mothers but have become important earning members of the family and in many cases, the primary bread earners for the family. They are involved as wage workers and take up entrepreneurial ventures to earn a living and bear the responsibilities for meeting the basic needs of the family. They work for long hours, at the same time, carrying out household chores such as cooking, cleaning and raising children, and engaging in other income-generating or income-substituting activities. Thus, most women these days are socio-economically empowered.

Like any other groups in the society, women empowerment is an important concept in socio-economic and national development. United Nations women conventions held in Beijing in 1995 made declarations for the empowerment and advancement of women, including the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, thereby guaranteeing them the possibility of realising their full potential in society and shaping their lives in accordance with their own aspirations (Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, 1995). Similarly, goal three of the eight cardinal programmes of Millennium Development Goals (2006) also promotes gender equality and empowerment of women. Records have shown that women constitute about half of the total world population (United Nations). The Nigerian National Population Census

(2006) also put Nigeria's population to 150 million; of which 52% were women, with about 45% of them living in the rural areas.

Women living in rural areas are women who reside in the rural communities of the country with low literacy and educational qualifications. These women are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the income of families and the growth of communities in a multitude of ways. They engage in low skill occupations and play multiple roles within the family and the community due to economic difficulties and responsibilities. They are also involved in small businesses such as farming, fishing, food processing, handicrafts, and even hunting (an area popularly dominated by men), while they take on a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home. Even though women living in rural areas in Nigeria are partners in the process of development, contributing to agricultural and national development of Nigeria, their roles generally are unrecognised and undervalued because of their low literacy levels. They seldom have access to information and input in the formulation of policies that concern their welfare and development. However, it should be noted that the importance of information to human development and empowerment cannot be overemphasised. In actual fact, the prosperity, progress, and development of any society depend upon people's ability to acquire, produce, access, and use information (Harande, 2009). As information brings progress to societies, the progress of individuals also depends, largely, upon the provision of the right kind of information, in the right form, and at

the right time. Information is essential and crucial to decision making, and up-to-date and reliable information is necessary for survival. Without adequate information, not much can be achieved especially when it concerns decision making or acquisition of knowledge and empowerment. Information has been linked with the socio-economic progress of a society, and considered an important attribute of the process of empowerment and social development (Wakelin and Simelane, 1995).

Studies have pointed out that, despite the significant roles played by women living in rural areas to the socio-economic development of their communities, majority of them are denied the resources, freedom and empowerment needed to carry out these roles successfully. These women do not have adequate access to information and information communication technologies (ICTs). 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 because people who are adequately informed are able to respond appropriately to the demand of their environments. Thus, women living in the rural areas need information to be adequately empowered in order to contribute their quota to the development of their nations because an informed woman is socio-economically empowered. Adekanye (2014) advocated that information is more important to the women group because of the fact that women constitute a large portion of the adult population in the world and also because of the roles they play in the lives of other categories of people (men, children, youths, etc.) in the population. The understanding of information needs of this group of individuals is therefore essential as it helps in planning, implementation and operation of information system and services that will be suitable for their needs. This is necessary because studies have observed that distinct information needs pertain to each group of people. Thus, this study investigated the information behaviour of women living in rural communities in Saki West local government, Nigeria as it affects their socio-economic status. This is with a view to have an insight into the information needs and seeking behaviour of the women for socio-economic empowerment. The study answered the following research questions:

i.   What are the information needs of rural women in Saki West local government, Nigeria?
ii. Do the women understand socio-economic empowerment?
iii. Are the women aware of the importance of information for socio-economic empowerment?
iv. What are the different information search strategies employed by the women?
v.   What are the sources of information they consult?
vi. Which of these sources do they prefer?
vii. What factors determine the choice of information sources used by the women?
viii. Do the women consider information obtained from these sources relevant to their needs?

Literature review
Information needs, sources and seeking:
Information behavior describes the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular, the ways in which people seek and utilise information (Bates, 2010). It is the totality of human behaviour in relation to sources and channel of information, an act a person engages in when identifying his needs for information, searching for information in any way and using or transferring that information (Wilson, 2000). Conceptualising information need could be a difficult task because the needs of individuals usually vary from time to time due to several factors. Information need usually emerge as a want or desire for information, thus, the concept of information behaviour actually begins with an individual's need. Aina (2004) defined information need as a piece of information, whether recorded or not, which an individual or a member of a group requires for effective functioning in their daily activities.

The need for information is always individualistic, depending on many factors, situations and circumstances surrounding the user, and on the consequences of applying the information, thus, people's information needs vary from general to professional, social, economic, cultural, political, scientific, technological, legal, affective, etc. (Kaniki, 2003; Nwagwu and Segilola, 2013). This means that information needs of one group of people could differ from another. Scholars, such as Nwagwu and Ajama (2011), and Omotayo (2017) are of the opinion that it is important to understand the information needs of different groups of people, as it helps in the planning, implementation, operation, designing of information systems and the development of service programmes that will be suitable for optimal performance of the

people. The assessment of information needs and seeking behaviour of various groups and individuals is essential in assisting them to access and use information resources for optimal performance, productivity and empowerment. Information needs, as conceived in the study, is define by the context in which women living in rural communities in Nigeria need information to perform their duties or functions effectively. This includes an understanding of the individual's personality, traits, social, political, economic or technological environment and the roles they play in different social and economic need contexts, in order to find out if these needs reflect the roles and responsibilities associated with their position within the socio-economic hierarchy. A thorough understanding of this group of people is fundamental to the provision of successful information resources and services for them.

Information seeking is a complimentary process to information need. The recognition of an information need is actually the impetus for information seeking. Information seeking could be explained to mean the activities or efforts undertaken to get information from various media to meet information needs or wants, or for the purpose of decision making. It can be viewed as the effective use of all avenues, approaches, tactics or ways of acquiring useful information for decision making or other objectives. Wilson (2000) defined information seeking as the purposive seeking for information because of a need to satisfy some goals. Information seeking behaviour of women living in rural communities would therefore involve a set of actions taken to express information needs, seek, evaluate, select and finally use information to satisfy those needs. In the course of seeking for information, the women might interact with several information sources and systems.

Information sources refer to person, place or theory from which information is obtained. Studies have shown that people living in rural areas in Nigeria generally have little or no education, thus are low-skilled workers who have low exposure to information resources. Furthermore, the majority of them do not know how to go about meeting their information needs, or even if they do, they tend to wait passively for their information needs to be met instead of taking proactive measures to meet them (Chimah and Udo, 2015; Ekoja, 2010). Past studies reveal that this group of individuals prefer informal sources of information,

especially conversations with individuals. They do not use library resources, and seldom use printed materials, but rather rely heavily on interpersonal sources (Omotayo, 2017). There are various information sources which could be available for women living in the rural areas. These include radio, television, family, friend, telephone, agricultural extension officers, community leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders, etc.

Conceptualising women's socio-economic empowerment

Various efforts have been made to conceptualise women's empowerment. Concerns with women's empowerment actually have their roots in grassroots mobilisations. The term empowerment covers a vast landscape of meanings, interpretations, definitions and disciplines. Empowerment gives marginalised people the rights or power to obtain some basic opportunities for themselves or through the help of non-marginalised others who share their own access to these people. Empowerment shows the decision making capacity of an individual and power to take control over resources, and vary from situation to situation or place to place (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002). Kabeer (2012) explained empowerment as the expansion of people's abilities to make strategic life choices and gaining confidence of one's abilities and potential. Studying socio-economic empowerment of women living in rural areas is important at this time in history because empowerment is often associated with feminism. Women constitute a major part of the society; consequently, it can be said that a prosperous and empowered society depends upon prosperous and empowered women. Akram, Shaheen and Kiyyani (2015) also pointed out that empowering a woman is like empowering the society.

In Nigeria, the empowerment of women has in the recent years come to be recognised as a central issue in determining the status of women. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS, 2004) recognises the need to integrate women into the development process by enhancing their capacity to participate in the economic, social, political and cultural life of the country through measures such as mainstreaming women's concerns and perspectives in all policies and programmes, and promoting women's access to micro-finance and other poverty alleviation strategies. Similarly, the Ministry of Women Affairs evolved a National Gender Policy

(2006, 2008), which highlights the rights and privileges of women within Nigeria.

Women's empowerment refers to women's ability to exercising some form of control and freedom in relation to their lives and over their resources (Khattab and Sakr, 2009). Women's empowerment gives women the rights, resources, and capacity to make decisions and act independently in social, economic, and political spheres. Some elements necessary for women empowerment include access to skill training, problems solving techniques, access to information and information technologies, and participation in decision making processes. According to Kabeer (2008, p. 27), 'the conceptualisation of empowerment touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their interrelationships with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities.'

Women participation in socio-economic activities is not a new phenomenon. Developed societies have given great deal of importance to socio-economic empowerment of women. Numerous researchers from all over the world have also raised the importance of socio-economic empowerment of women to the society at large. Socio-economic empowerment of women is a process of developing a sense of autonomy, self-confidence, control of resources and participation in decision making for the women in order to exclude them from poverty and marginalisation. Women's socio-economic empowerment gives women power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in the society. One of the essential requirements for women in achieving socio-economic empowerment is to be engaged in some jobs, skills or entrepreneurial activities, which can give them sense of freedom, autonomy, compatibility and utilisation of abilities in an effective manner.

In the context of this study, socio-economic empowerment is described from the viewpoint of a woman being information empowered and financially independent. This includes having access to ICTs and information resources that would meet their needs and enhance income-generating capacity. Socio-economic empowerment of women also includes actively participating in household decision-making on issues that affect their livelihood, such as number of children and child spacing, choice of health care facilities, children's schools, etc. Socio-economically empowering women gives self-worth that is gained through awareness and ability to negotiate and voice out concerns on issues that infringe on their rights as a person and as a woman. It also involves having control over the income generated by investing in personal properties, having personal savings either in thrifts or banks and contributing to the financial upkeep of their household. Socio-economic activities engaged by women living in rural areas in Nigeria vary and subsistence, and include farming, animal husbandry, fishing, trading, bead-making, cloth-weaving, dyeing, mat-weaving, soap-making, pottery, hair dressing, fashion designing, black-smiting, bead making, among others (Nwagwu and Ajama, 2011; Patrick and Ferdinand, 2016). These activities are constrained by certain socio-cultural factors, which include lack of access to information, among other factors.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The location of the study is Saki West local government, Oyo State, Nigeria. The 2006 census population of the local government is 273,268, with women constituting 49.25% of the population. This local government was purposively selected because of the concentration of rural communities. The occupation of the women in the area are mainly farming and trading. There are 41 rural communities in the area. Convenience sampling technique was used to select eight communities namely: Ago Oluwabi, Ataye, Ekokan, Gaa Dogo, Idera, Mua, Sanmisala and Wasengere. Convenience sampling was used to select 56 women who participated in the study because the total number of women in the communities could not be determined. Interview was chosen as the instrument for data collection as majority of the women did not did not go to school and so did not have the skills to complete a questionnaire. Moreover, it was envisaged that interview would provide a rich detailed picture of the information needs of the women for socio-economic empowerment.

The research instrument was designed in English, and structured in accordance with the constructs

embedded in the objective and research questions of the study in order to ensure its validity. The interview guide was then transcribed to Yoruba language, which is the language understood and spoken by the women. The research instrument was validated by a researcher at the Africa Regional Centre for Information Science, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, to determine the appropriateness of the questions to the study and ensure that the questions elicited relevant responses. Their comments and suggestions were integrated into the final instrument (see Appendix A).

The interview was conducted in Yoruba language at the homes and work places of the women by the researchers with the assistance of one research assistant. The interview period lasted approximately four weeks (December 12-30, 2017). The respondents' rights for confidentiality and privacy were taken into consideration in the process of designing the instrument and during the interview process. The process of data collection followed a formal path. The researchers first introduced themselves to the respondents and communicated the purpose of the study to them. Informed consents were sought before the interviews were conducted and respondents given the free will to choose whether or not to participate in the study. The interview sessions were recorded on tape recorders. The data collected from the tape recorders were transcribed verbatim into text and translated to English, and analysed thematically. The transcribed data were grouped and categorised into themes according to the objective and research questions. The demographic data was sorted by age, religion, level of education, marital status, occupation and number of children criteria. Texts were searched to identify recurrent themes conveying similar meanings. These themes were illustrated with some quotations from the original texts.

Findings and discussion

The major findings of the study are discussed under the following headings: demographic information of the women, awareness of importance of information for socio-economic empowerment, information needs of the women, information sources and seeking behaviour. The respondents were in the age range: 19-25 (5%), 26-35 (15%), 36-45 (15%), 46-55 (20%), 56-65 (40%) and above 65 (5%). Thus, age range 56-65 had the highest number of respondents. Seventy per cent of the respondents were Muslims, while 30% were Christians. Twenty five per cent of the women had primary education, 15% had secondary education, while 60% did not go to school; however, about 20% of those who indicated that they had no western education said they had Quranic education. Sixty per cent of the women were married, 15% were divorced/separated, while 25% were widows. Majority of the women (40%) were farmers, 25% were traders, 30% were engaged in handwork (pottery, bead making, tailoring, food processing and soap making), while 5% were full-time homemakers (did not have any job). However, some of the women were involved in two or more of these occupations, that is, some were farmers, traders and also engaged in handicrafts (cloth and mat weaving). Majority of the women (40%) had five children. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the demographic information.

Table 1. Demographic information of the women

Category	Measure	%
Age	19-25 years	5
	26-35 years	15
	36-45 years	15
	46-55 years	20
	56-65 years	40
	Above 65 years	5
Religion	Islam	70
	Christianity	30
Educational Qualification	Primary	25
	Secondary	15
	Tertiary	0
	No Western Education	48
	Quranic Education	12
Marital Status	Single	0
	Married	60
	Divorced/Separated	15
	Widow	25
Occupation	Farming	40
	Trading	25
	Handwork	30
	No work	5
Number of Children	One	10
	Two	25
	Three	5
	Four	10
	Five	40
	Above Five	10

Generally, the majority of the women (54) had an idea of what information is, but their level of understanding varied:

Information is what makes one to be able to discern between right and wrong. (65 year old, Wasengere community)

Information is the thing I need to function as human being. It is something every human being needs to be able to live, for example, the prices of the things I buy and sell is information (57 year old, Mua community)

To me, my understanding of information means having news or knowledge that can help one to carry out a task or solve a problem (38 year old, Ekokan community)

However, despite the variations in their knowledge of information, majority of the women (54) had an understanding of the importance information to daily living:

Information makes us to know what is going on around us. It gives us a hedge over others (56 year old, Ago Oluwabi community)

Information does not make us to go astray or go the wrong way. For instance, if I want to go somewhere I don't know or familiar with, I need to ask people for direction. But if I don't ask, I can get lost. (64 year old, Ekokan community)

I don't think any human being can survive without having or using information. We all need information to do one task or the other. For instance, my neighbour told me yesterday that a farmer wanted to sell his palm kernels this morning. I quickly rushed to his farm as I woke up today because his products are less expensive than some other farmers. I know I will be able to make much gain from the products I bought from him. To me, that is information. (46 year old, Mua community)

Majority of the women (49) understood socio-economic empowerment and could explain it. More than half of them (44) agreed that women should be economically independent:

Socio-economic empowerment means being able to mix freely with people in the society and also being able to survive without depending on other people. (35 year old, Idera community)

I really cannot explain what it means. But I think it is having the opportunity of not depending solely on our husbands to provide everything we need for us. (46 years old, Ataye community)

Socio-economic empowerment means having the freedom to leave the home to work in the society. For example, one of my friends here is not allowed to work by her husband because the husband told her that he didn't want another man to snatch her from him. She is always at home and does not mix freely with people. The most annoying part is that the husband does not take good care of her. She usually comes to me to assist her with money. To my own understanding, I think the woman is not socio-economically empowered (47 years old, Sanmisala community)

I think it means having a job and not depending on others to survive. I believe it is good for women to have something doing. These days, things are not really easy. Women need to support their husband to take care of the children and family. When I first married my husband, I was not doing anything. But when our children were growing up and things became difficult I begged him to allow me start a trading business and he agreed. I sell yam flour and gaari (cassava flour), and this gives me the opportunity to meet my financial needs and take good care of my children. (56 years old, Ataye community)

Socio-economic empowerment means giving women freedom to work. It is not good for women not to have freedom to work and be relevant in the society. I participate in politics. I am the woman leader of my ward. My husband initially did not want me to be a politician but when he discovered I have interest in politics, he reluctantly allowed me. My participation in politics is what made our community to have a borehole. (45 years old, Wasengere community)

Socio-economic empowerment means having a job or occupation that brings in money for the person. However, men should be the one providing for women. Women are not supposed to work but to stay at home to take care of the husband and children (48 years old, Gaa Dogo community)

I really do not understand the meaning, but I don't think women should be too independent. Women are supposed to be taken care of by men. So there is no need for women to work. (57 years old, Ago Oluwabi community)

Most of the women (46) were aware of the importance of information to socio-economic empowerment.

Of course, I need information all the time, perhaps every day and need it to be empowered. (55 years old, Ekokan community)

I am of the opinion that information is needed by everybody to exist, not only to be socio-economically empowered. This existence revolves around the job one does, the community one lives and even things that happen around us. Every human being needs information to be empowered. For instance, I am a trader. I feed my family from the proceeds I make because I am a widow. I need information to be able to make enough profit from what I sell. (56 years old, Ataye community)

Well, I know information can give one an edge over competitors. So information is needed to be empowered. (40 years old, Ilua community)

The types of information the women needed varied:
I need information majorly about my profession (soap making). I make bathing soap. I am always ready to know about new things that can improve my profession. In times past, we used to wrap the soap in paper and nylon. There was a day I went to see my sister in Saki town, she bought the same type of soap and I noticed the soap was put in a small bowl and the soap had nice fragrance than the one we make here. I inquired and was told the person that made the soap added fragrances to make the soap more attractive to buyers. I had to go and ask the woman the type of fragrances she added and where I can get it so I can also improve my own. Even though the woman was not willing to tell me, but when I persisted, she gave me the information but collected some money from me for the information. This information has really helped to improve my sales. (58 years old, Ataye community)

I always need information about the prices of foodstuff. You know the way prices go up in Nigeria these days. The price of things you buy today may not be the same tomorrow. Therefore, I always ask people that go to the market everyday about prices of foodstuff so that I will have an idea of how much to take along when I want to go and do shopping. (48 years old, Idera community)

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I need information about my health, especially on family planning. I do not want to have more children. I already have four children. I have done family planning before and it failed. Now I try to be careful and so always like to have information that can guide me not to get pregnant again since I cannot afford not to have sexual intercourse with my husband (35 years old, Mua community).

These responses show that information needs of the women tended towards their occupations and socio-economic development - occupational, childcare, family, and health related information. The women were less concerned about getting information about politics, entertainment, education, technology and sports. These responses support the findings of Hossain and Islam (2012), Ifukor (2011), Nwagwu and Ajama (2011), Patrick and Ferdinand (2016).

The information sources of the women revolved around their families and communities and their information seeking behaviours were mainly informal. They consulted their husbands, families, friends, colleagues, neighbours, and elders to seek for information, but most especially consulted their husbands. Very few of them (21) said they listened to radio, while none said they read books, newspapers or magazines to seek for information. The women also said they did not listen to news on television (TV) because the communities did not receive TV signals, while very few (7) who had TVs in their houses used them only to watch films on Video Compact Discs:

I seek information from my husband, friends and fellow traders. (64 years old, Wasengere community)

I usually ask information from my friends and family. I also ask my mother for information because she lives with us. I also go to the nurses and doctors at the community health centre to seek for information. (55 years old, Ekokan community)

Agricultural extension officers usually visit our community regularly to inform and educate us about modern methods of farming. I also ask my husband, friends and other fellow farmers for information. (57 years old, Gaa Dogo community)

We do not watch television here to listen to news. We only used it to play video cassette. But I know that people in big towns used to watch the TV to listen to news. Anytime I go to Osogbo to visit my junior sister, they listened to news on TV. (64 years old, Ataye community)

Very few (22) of the women had mobile phones, which were basic phones used to make voice calls, while only eight of them knew how to use the phones to send text messages. None of them had smart phones and none had heard about the Internet, e-mail or social media.

I do not have a phone, but my husband has one. I don't think I can afford to use mobile phone because I don't have a stable job. You know one needs to be buying recharge cards on the phone. Anytime I need to call someone I ask my husband to allow me use his own (48 years old, Mua community)

My son that is working in Ilorin bought a phone for me so we can be able to talk occasionally. However, I do not usually use the phone to seek for information. More so, the telephone service (network) in this community is very poor. I always move to the next community to use the phone anytime I want to talk to my son (51 years old, Ago Oluwabi community)

The agricultural extension officer that used to come here encouraged me to buy a phone so that I can have the opportunity to call him when I need him. He was the one that even helped me buy the phone from Saki town. I always use the phone to call him to come and pick honey when it is ready because he sells honey and he always buy from me (68 years old, Ilua community)

I do not have a phone. Even my friend that has one always complains of bad network. She cannot use the phone here. She only uses it when she goes to Saki town. (57 years old, Gaa Dogo community)

These findings are in line with the results of studies of Chimah and Udo (2015), Feder and Savastano (2006), Hossain and Islam (2012), Nwagha (1992), Nwagwu and Ajama (2011), Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) and Yanru, (2006). Most of the women lacked the skills needed to use ICTs. This is attributable to their low literacy skill, educational and income level, which pose challenge to their adoption of modern technology to seek and share information. Nwagwu and Ajama (2011) equally found that low educational and income statuses were impediments to accessibility of information by women in Okitipupa community, Ondo State, Nigeria.

These findings confirm that majority of people living in rural communities in developing countries, especially those with low levels of education; have not adopted the habit of utilising information sources such as libraries, information centres and ICTs in their work

lives because of their low literacy levels. They depend on interpersonal sources of information such as their husbands, families, community leaders, pastors, imams, and others with higher socio-economic status in the community, to get information. Thus, their information-seeking behaviours include passive quests for information and heavy reliance on opinion leaders, rumours, and oral sources. This therefore calls on the government and other stakeholders to create enabling environments for the women to have access to and use modern ICTs to have access to information needed for their socio-economic empowerment.

Generally, the women believed the sources of information were adequate to meet their needs, while few said there were times the information they got were not adequate:

I always get adequate information I need, either from my husband, colleagues, friends or family. (49 years old, Mua community)

I have always been able to get the information I need except on very few occasions. (47 years old, Gaa Dogo community)

The information I get from my husband and people around me are always enough to meet my needs. (71 years old, Sanmisala community)

The preferences of the women concerning information sources varied. Generally, majority of them (48) preferred consulting their husbands, family members, friends and clergy because of availability and easy accessibility. Thus, the women had a lot of trust in their husbands and close family members:

I prefer asking my husband and family members for information. You know you cannot trust some people too much. Other people can take advantage of you at times. (59 years old, Idera community)

I prefer asking my family members for information (39 years old, Sanmisala community)

I prefer asking my husband and mother for information. I also ask my friends, but on rare occasions. (27 years old, Idera community)

My husband is always my first point of call when I need information or need to know about something. At times, I also consult my mother and friends. But I prefer my family to people that are not very close to me. (49 years old, Ilua community)

My husband is late, so I usually ask my Imam (clergy) for information because I believe he know more than me. I also consult my friend at times. We also get information during our tailoring association meetings

we hold every week (38 years old, Wasengere community)

What do the women want, and what should they want?

This study has been able to provide an exposition into what women living in rural communities in Nigeria actually wanted. The results reveal that the women wanted socio-economic empowerment. It should, however, be noted that the women could not be successfully empowered without having access to information. Information and empowerment are inextricable intertwined; therefore, the significance of information in enhancing empowerment and socio-economic development of the women cannot be over-emphasised. Information gives power and enlightenment and is a tool to socio-economic development. In fact, the main objective of information society is to empower people through access to and use of information. Adekanye and Haliso (2015) explained that access to quality and relevant information helps people cope with demands placed upon them by their environment and enable them function properly. Baggaley, Calleja, Marum and Marum (2013, p.1) corroborated by stating that 'knowledge is power; information is liberation'. Access to information will give the women empowerment and liberate them from poverty and ignorance. Thus, the women should want information in addition to socio-economic empowerment. Provision of adequate and timely information for this category of people who can be termed to be information poor because of their place of abode is therefore, a necessity and not a luxury.

Conclusion

Women have been described as indispensable in the development of any nation. Apart from their numerical strength as projected by the Nigeria Census Statistics of 2006, women in Nigeria have great potentials necessary to evolve a new economic order, accelerate social, economic and political development, and consequently transform the society into a better one. Women empowerment is one of the tools that can be used to advance development and reduce poverty among women. The study provides an insight into the information behaviour of women living in some rural communities in Nigeria to create awareness among government agencies and other stakeholders of the basic problems facing women living in rural areas with regards to availability of information resources needed

to meet their various needs. The study has also provided an adequate understanding of the information needs of the women which is crucial in devising plans and strategies that address women's socio-economic well-being in the areas of empowerment, commitment, entrepreneurial development, capacity building and innovation.

The study could provide opportunities for enlightenment programmes through which investors would be encouraged to look towards the direction of providing information resources that would extend to the people living in rural areas. The results of the study could also contribute to decision-making and policy formulation aimed at integrating policies that will foster the use of ICTs to seek and share information among the low educated rural women in Nigeria.

Recommendations

As ICT adoption and use has become an integral part of the modern world, access to adequate, accurate and timely information is a key factor needed for successful women empowerment. The study therefore recommends that necessary ICTs infrastructure and resources required for information seeking, use, sharing and socio-economic empowerment of the women be made available to the rural communities. Telecommunication providers should extend their services to these communities so they can also be part of the global information village. Education is a catalyst for women's empowerment. Education and training, being a major social empowerment for women, should be universally made available to women in the rural communities as low level of literacy and education impedes economic development of a country in the current, rapidly changing technology-driven world. Governments and other stakeholders should organise training for these women in order to give them the basic skills needed to use ICTs, to seek and share information.

The study has some limitations. The study investigated the information behaviour of rural women in just eight communities in the local government, which is just a subset of rural communities in Nigeria. Further studies could focus on other communities or do a comparative study of information behaviour of urban and rural women. In addition, the study employed interviews as the instrument for data collection. Subsequent studies could consider using the quantitative approach.

Notes

All quotes are reported anonymously and verbatim.

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