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INFORMATION NEEDS, SOURCES, AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF RURAL WOMEN IN BADAGRY, LAGOS, NIGERIA.

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Abstract
This work which focuses on the rural women as information users was carried out using 200 questionnaires in order to ascertain the information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural women. The barrier to information flow to them was also identified. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The result showed that the rural women do not have access to adequate information because the libraries as well as the local government, who this responsibility rests on, have been inefficient. Recommendations such as; organizing adult education programmes, sending Health workers, Agricultural Extension workers etc, to educate the rural women were made to ameliorate the situation.

Introduction
Human efforts towards attaining goals depend highly on effective communication of information, and the major ingredient that makes communication possible is information. Information is an important resource for individual growth and survival. The progress of modern societies as well as individuals depends a great deal upon the provision of the right kind of information, in the right form and at the right time. Information is needed to be able to take a right decision and also reduce uncertainty. A business man needs information to be able to improve in his existing business just like a specialist also needs information to be up-to-date and well informed in his area of specialization. If information is this valuable, it must be put to proper use, that is, made available to people or group of people who need it, after ascertaining the groups' information needs and information seeking behaviour.

We have different categories of information users. Such includes students, lecturers, market women, trader, farmers, bankers, journalists etc. This work shall be concentrating on the "rural women" as its information user group. Although much have been written on the needs and utilization of information, most of these writings have concentrated on the educated elite who have been provided with different types/sources of information with which to satisfy his information needs. On the contrary, the rural people who are mostly illiterate are taken for granted because the few studies conducted about them have only had very little effect on the availability and provision of information and information resources to them.

Objectives of the study
This study aims to investigate the information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural women in Badagry, Lagos. Specifically, the study aim to identify the various categories of people that make up the rural women, their information needs, sources and media for obtaining information, their information seeking behaviour, and to identify the barriers to information flow to the rural women.

Literature review
The concept of information
The concept of information is very complex and difficult than ordinarily meets the eyes. This is evident in the various definitions and attributes of the concept. Notwithstanding the fact that information is as old as man, and that it affects and is affected by all aspects of human activities, no consensual definition of the word exists in the literature. Available definitions reflect the emphasis and perhaps prejudice of their proponents. Information is a multi-disciplinary concept. It is against this background that Cliss (1986) observes that the data processing manager might conceive it in terms of data, the records manager in terms of records and reports, the librarian or information scientists in terms of document or materials and the rural women in terms of message. Thus, Yuexiao (1988) opine that when it comes to defining information, it is really an elusive and controversial concept. The foregoing according to Ajewole (2001) had led
Information Trends Vol. 4 & 5 2007

to the categorization of information definition into three (3) strands. The first is the scientific and technical information (STI). This is within the domain of scientific and technological communities. The second strand is socio-cultural. In this context, information is viewed as knowledge, which is transferable in the conduct of various activities. In the final strand, information is perceived as a basic resource and an indispensable and irreplaceable link between a variety of activities, intellectual and material, in the service of society, institutions and individuals. However, within each of these strands, there is no consensual definition of the concept. Thus Gilchrist (1982) lamented that one of the difficulties information professionals have always grappled within their profession and with which scholars are still trying to cope with, is that of the definition of information. For the course of this study, Ajewole’s information definitions in the last two strands are accepted. Notwithstanding, there seems to be agreement on the capabilities of information and these are well documented in the literature. Information is capable of provoking actions and inaction in the recipient. This may have informed Gordon’s (1994) description of information as referring primarily to the human understanding that steers human action and consequently control signals in any living organism. Similarly Shera (1972) has defined information as that which is transmitted by the act or process of communication. According to him, it may be a message, signal or stimulus. It assumes a response in the receiving organism and therefore, possessed a response potential. However, Davies (1976) gave a broader definition. He defined information as data that has been processed into a form that is meaningful to the recipient and is of real or perceived value in current or future decisions. Hamreftors (1996) opines that information serves as a base for competent development. According to Ginzberg (1980), information reduces uncertainty while Gilad (1996) posits that information reduces risks in decision making. Okeh (1996) posits that information reduces risks in decision making. Okeh (1999) opined that information is needed to solve day-to-day problems such as finding consumer goods, locating appropriate medical facilities for family health, investment opportunities, government policies and so on. Machlup and Masfields (1983), also defined it as all published and unpublished knowledge about any given subject. Information is the resource, which allows us to change and improve the society we live in. It unfolds man physically and spiritually. It is a resource for the acquisition of power. It can be used in making rational decisions by individuals, group of individual, organizations as well as getting the rural women informed and mobilizing them into actions.

Identification and description of rural women as information users

An information user is anyone who exposes himself/herself to available information in a given environment with the intention of applying or utilizing it in particular life endeavour or solving problems.

According to Aina (2004) the term information user is all embracing, used broadly to include all those who avail themselves the utilization of available information. Information users are in different categories and have different backgrounds, while some are highly educated; many are not, while some are old people, many are young and while some live in the rural areas, others live in the urban areas. However, rural women as information users are the focal point of this work. Rural women from a layman’s point of view refers to women living or residing in an isolated area in which virtually all economic and social services necessary for life enjoyment are currently lacking. It refers to group of women that are mainly illiterate who resides in a remote area or village. This group of women can barely read or write. According to the encyclopedia of education, rural people are people that live in the open country and in small villages. The encyclopedia Britannica (1974) defined rural people as most of the farm and peasant people of the world who live in the village or isolated place. The Webster’s dictionary also sees rural as relating to, or characteristics of people who live in the country opposed to urban, characterized by simplicity, lacking sophistication and engaged in agricultural pursuits. To Nzirimo, rural people (which by implication includes rural women) are characterized by the following: extreme poverty, exploitation of labour power, inadequate and poor medical facilities with in-experienced teachers, malnutrition, diseases of all types and high infant mortality, lack of electricity, inadequate school facilities with in-experienced teachers, exploitation of labour power, inadequate and poor medial facilities. Rural women are known for going to farm in the morning and returning so late in the evening, come rain or sunshine. They have no relaxed moment, no public holidays or off-duty period. They medicate on herbs and leave, brewed and fermented in unhygienic
environment. They are open to the attacks of pests, insects and reptiles of all types.

**Work activities and information seeking behaviours of rural women**

Since rural women are women that live in the rural areas or villages and are mostly illiterates, their jobs/work activities are bound to be unskilful jobs/work that does not require professional expertise. They are generally involved in house keeping and household works as well as farming. Aina (2004) posit that outside farming, rural women are equally involved in such occupational like pottery, dyeing of clothes, cloth making, petty trading, hair dressing, craftwork, tailoring etc.

For rural women to perform excellently in their work activities, they require information. Their information seeking behaviour depends on their individual personalities, attitudes, value, systems behaviours and level of socialization. In other words, it is the product of their socio-cultural, economic, environmental and individual characteristics. According to the International Encyclopedia of information and library science (1997), information-seeking behaviour connotes the complex patterns of actions and interactions which people engage in when seeking information of whatever kind and for whatever purpose. Generally, information perception and needs affect information seeking behaviour. For instance a rural woman is most likely to wait longer in the village square or town hall for information on fertilizer than information on how to establish industries. On the other hand, the ability of the rural women to seek and utilize information also modifies the way she captures and perceives information, which equally affects her successes in her work activities.

**Information needs and information utilization patterns of rural women**

The information needs of an individual or group of individual’s depends highly on the work activities of such an individual or group of individuals. The information needs of a Medical doctor will definitely be on the treatment of sicknesses and correction of anomalies while that of a student is on his/her academic curriculum. The rural women, who, this work is concentrating on, do not have specific information need like the doctors and students rather, they individually have different information needs based on their work activities. For instance, a farmer will need information on fertilizer and seeds while a hairdresser will need information on hairstyles. Ehikhamenor (1990) affirmed the above statement when he posits that the information needs of academic scientists are not quite the same as those of scientists in industries.

Kumar (1980) opines that determining the needs of the users’ means knowing about their requirement for information. In order to determine their requirements, it is essential to know the following: who they are, their background (qualification, knowledge of language, areas of research and specialization) and the purpose they need the information for. Paisely (1987) as cited by Okwilagwe, O.A. and Opeke R.O. (1998) stresses that the five factors which affects the information needs of human beings are; their background, professional orientation, the full array of information sources available, motivation and other individual characteristics such as the social, political, economic and other systems that affect the users and their functions.

From the on going, the information needs of the rural women are mainly indigenous information. This type of information includes knowledge held by local people, gained and transmitted informally, usually by oral tradition. According to Okwilagwe (1993), rural women have great need for information and, this information can be put into the following categories:

(a) **Neighbourhood:-** This includes information on neighbours, children, dogs and rats in neighborhood, vacant lots, abandoned cars, Obaship Positions, farm lands, local elections etc.

(b) **Consumer:-** Includes information on product quality, product availability, best product, service quality, prices, consumer protection etc.

(c) **Housing:-** Information on loans and mortgages, getting a place to live, public housing, building materials and their price, selling of houses etc.

(d) **House Keeping and House Maintenance:-** Information utility service, making repairs, regulations on home improvements, car repairs and operations etc.

(e) **Employment:-** Under this we have information on getting or keeping jobs, changing jobs, job training, unions, job creation policies etc.

(f) **Health:-** Getting health care for one’s self and the family, cost of health care etc.
Information Trends Vol. 4 & 5 2007

(g) **Education and Schooling**: Information on financial aid, adult education services, cost of education, the educational system, parent-teacher relationship etc.

(h) **Transportation**: Information on bus services, getting trucks for farm services, road maintenance, emergency services etc.

(i) **Recreation and Culture**: Finding recreational opportunities, creating recreational opportunities, supervision at playground, cost of recreation etc.

(j) **Financial Matters and Assistance**: Taxes, getting credit loan, investments, handling money etc.

(k) **Public Assistance and Social Security**: Unemployment compensation, social security, stamps, food welfare etc.

(l) **Family planning and Control**: Information on family planning and birth Control.

(m) **Childcare and Family Relationship**: Information on problems of childcare, need for daycare, cost of day care, general family relationship.

(n) **Legal**: Legal aspects of marriage, contracts, need for legal service, interpretation of law etc.

(o) **Public Affairs, Political and Miscellaneous**: Information on locating agencies and people, political issues and politicians, general government information, religion, current events etc.

To buttress the above, Okeh (1999) stresses that information is needed to solve day to day problems such as finding consumer goods, locating appropriate medical facilities for family health, investment opportunities, government policies and so on. Aboyade (1987) in a recent study of library services to the rural people enumerated the following information needs:

(a) **Health Related Matters**: This includes information on building of pit latrines, balanced diet, antenatal care, care of infertility, regular water supply etc.

(b) **Agricultural Implements and Materials**: Supply of fertilizers pest and weed control etc.

(c) **Educational Matters**: Eradication of illiteracy schools for children etc.

(d) **Social Matters**: Electricity, good roads, transportation system, employment opportunities, legal matters, credit and loan facilities, political awareness, religious matters etc.

**Sources of information and media for disseminating information to rural women**

Sources of information are tools that can possibly meet the information needs of different categories of users. They are the information carriers while the media is the medium through which information is passed to the user. The speculated and realistic benefit desirable from a source makes that source useful and sustainable. There are different source of information but what matters are 'what' sources are available and relevant to the different categories of users and what sources of information are useful for their different seeking behaviours and choices.

The rural women as identified in this work are women that live in the villages, who are mainly illiterates and whose main source of livelihood is farming. Since majority of them cannot read or write the most suitable source of information for them are audio-visuals and inter-personal communication which include, Radio, Television, Trade Associations, Age group association, Health workers, Village drums, Town criers & whistling, Churches, Mosques, local government workers, friends and relatives, Oba's palace public libraries, posters and handbills (Nicholas & Marden, 1998).

Supporting the above statement Adegbule-Adesina (1991) opines that since the essence of the rural libraries is to provide basic information to the peasant farmers and illiterates, and bearing in mind that these people cannot read or write, these libraries must provide not only books and other printed materials but also a lot of non-print and audio visual materials because these people obtain and understand information better through oral, visual and auditory means of communication.

Okwilagwe (1993) also identified three categories of communication media available for rural people. They are:

1. Interpersonal or people-based or face to face media which includes, the news or press conference, interviewing, speech making, public meetings, group discussions, drama, home visit, role playing etc.

2. Mass media, which includes radio, Television, Newspapers, cinema, folk theatre, billboards, magazines etc.

3. Other media (not confined to mass media) which includes, publications and loose leaflets, video (forum), film strips,
slides, exhibitions and displays, bulletin board, photographs.

However, some factors have been identified as constraints to accessing or utilizing information by rural women. Such include; illiteracy or lack of knowledge, poverty, lack of infra-structural facilities and lack of interest. (Matthacidesona, 1997) as cited by (Adelami, 2002).

Methodology
The descriptive survey method of investigation was adopted for this study using simple stratified random sampling technique. Interviews, questionnaires, and observations were used as instruments to collect data. Data collected was analyzed using tables, percentages and frequency distribution.

Findings of study
Response on educational qualification
From the respondents’ responses, a large percentage (41%) of the rural women is illiterates. Secondary school dropouts make up 29.5% of the respondents; primary school certificate holders are 25%; secondary school certificate holders are 3.5% while primary school dropouts are 1% of the entire respondents.

Table 1: Response on work activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Activities</th>
<th>Very Often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F %</td>
<td>F %</td>
<td>F %</td>
<td>F %</td>
<td>F %</td>
<td>F %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House keeping and Household</td>
<td>110 55</td>
<td>80 40</td>
<td>10 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maintenance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>52 26</td>
<td>88 44</td>
<td>50 25</td>
<td>10 5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>156 78</td>
<td>41 20.5</td>
<td>3 1.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion designing</td>
<td>12 6</td>
<td>6 3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>182 91</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair Dressing</td>
<td>17 8.5</td>
<td>12 6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>171 85.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knitting of clothing materials</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>4 2</td>
<td>194 97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftwork</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>198 99</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House wife</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4 2</td>
<td>194 97</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200 100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above findings, a large percentage of the respondents (78%) declared themselves as full-time farmers, 26.6% are traders while only 1% of the respondents stay at home doing nothing very few of them (2%) are occasionally involved in knitting of clothing material and (1%) in craftwork. This result establishes that farming as well as house keeping and household maintenance are the major work activities of rural women. The reason for this is that they are mainly illiterates.
Table 2: Response on information needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Needs</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information about people, institutions, companies, places.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About procedures for performing tasks.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About laws, administrative rules &amp; policies</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On new products</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>60.5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About health</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>87</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About housekeeping and household maintenance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About education &amp; schooling.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About child care &amp; family relationships.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About financial matters &amp; assistance.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About politics</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On fertilizers &amp; seeds</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On their information needs, 93.5% of the respondents affirmed that they require information on fertilizers and seeds very often, 43.5% on housekeeping and household maintenance, 22% on new products while 78.5% often require information on children and family relationships, 60.5% on health. On the other hand, 88% and 89% respectively never seek information on Laws, administrative rules and policies as well as politic. The result implies that the rural women are apolitical and exhibit indifferent attitude towards the laws and governance of their state.

Table 3: Response on sources of information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Source</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade Association / Traders.</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43
The above findings indicate that the most often consulted and available sources of information for the rural women are: family members & friends (40.5%), Village drums, town crier and whistling (36%), Trade Association/Traders (34%), and the churches/mosques (31%) while the library as a result of lack of awareness on the part of the respondents, has never been a source of information for them. The respondents equally affirmed that they often get/acquire information from neighbours & co-workers (56%), Age group association (42.5%), Oba’s Palace (23.5%) and Television and Radio (13%).

Discussion
The study without doubt has led to the establishment of facts as regards the information needs and utilization of rural women. It has shown that the majority of the rural women are illiterates whose major means of livelihood is farming. It has equally shown that in the information age, when survival depends highly on information, the rural women are not provided with adequate relevant information as well as sources of information that can affect their lives better. The importance of information as supportive input for rural development is yet to be recognized in Badagry, Lagos state. The findings of this study would to a large extent represent the scenario in many parts of Nigeria. That the rural women also require information for their enlightenment, entertainment, security, self-help, self-reliance etc is not given the attention it requires. The study revealed that the library was not known or cited as source of information by the rural women. Indeed, it is ranked least among the sources listed. The implication of these findings for the development of library and information profession in Africa is enormous.

Firstly, it shows that libraries, in spite of previous studies and attempts to improve their services, are yet to make appreciable developments Secondly, the library as a source of information has failed in creating awareness on its existence and services hence it is not patronized by the rural women.

Thirdly, the local government also has not been forth coming in enlightening and providing relevant information to the rural women.

Recommendations
In view of the above situation, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. The library (staff) should get closer to the rural women and enlighten them on the information and services they provide.
2. The library should provide not only printed materials but also a lot of non-print and audio-visual materials since the rural women obtain and understand information better through oral, visual and auditory means of communication.
The library can equally repackage some of the printed materials into non-print form.

3. The local government should be sending health workers as well as Agricultural Extension Workers to educate the rural women on health and Agricultural matters.

4. The local government should equally organize adult education programme for the rural women as this will enhance their information utilization capacity.

5. Library should commence collaboration with media houses and other government information agencies to package and disseminate information to the various groups of women in the rural areas.

6. Community outreach programmes should equally be organized and used to disseminate information that would aid the socio-economic, political and general enlightenment of the rural women.

References


