Libraries, Information and Resource Centres as a Tool for Women and Economic Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT:

The role of Women libraries, Documentation and Resource Centres in the economic development of women is examined and the types of literature gathered, processed and disseminated is surveyed The activities of the Centres concerning women education, information literacy level and the economic activities of the Women in the community were observed and assessed to find out the impact they have on society.

Women Special Centres and NGOs were used in the study. Questionnaire, Interview and Participatory Observation methods were used in data gathering.

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The results show that the Women Centres run literacy programs for women and girls and also provide training for less privileged women to facilitate their economic independence as they make a living from skills acquired through vocational training.

Women farmers are assisted in getting loans, and the libraries provide needed literature in book and audio-visual form for them. Information related to their reproductive health is also provided. Women depend to a great extent on the resources and facilities of these Centres.

Recommendations are made on how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be used to greater advantage to network and reach majority of women especially in the rural community.

LIBRARIES, INFORMATION AND RESOURCE CENTERS AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

1. **INTRODUCTION**

In every society, economic development is an important part of social living especially the specific economic activities of women in the development of that society. Our knowledge of any society therefore, would be incomplete if it excluded both the production and distribution of different kinds of goods and services in the society concerned. These goods and services are basics to social life because they satisfy the necessary needs for clothing, feeding, shelter and so on, of members of the society.

However, due to artificial barriers created by culture and local traditions, women are not expected to do the same jobs considered as 'men's jobs'. Most of the economic activities of women are therefore centered on farming, livestock and poultry production, processing of farm produce, hat and basket weaving, textile production and so on. In situations where they have white-collar jobs women are only expected to perform clerical and secretarial functions. Adekanye (2004) reiterates this fact, stating that government and Non-governmental agencies acknowledge women's participation in agriculture. They play a major part in the provision of food for the nation. The women are encouraged to form formal cooperative societies and to participate actively in existing men dominated cooperatives. The number of women in cooperative societies has increased over time, but few women hold executive posts. The women are involved in different types of cooperatives. These include handicraft, consumer, credit and agricultural production (poultry and piggery) cooperative societies. (Adekanye, 2004).

Due to limitations placed on women by societal stereotypes, they cannot express their full potentials neither can they experience optimum output from their activities. This leads to

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increasingly scarce economic resources for women. This gender-based barrier i.e. imbalance in access to, or control over economically productive resources is a critical issue for poverty in Nigeria. Women perform their multiple economic and household responsibilities in the face of systemic discrimination in accessing the basic technologies and resources, which are required to function in an economically productive and efficient manner.

2.   OBJECTIVES

- To find out the role of libraries and resource centers in collecting and disseminating information for women's socio-economic development
- To determine if development information was being systematically collected by libraries and resource centers
- To ascertain the level of collaboration and networking amongst women groups, community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations and cooperative associations
- To explore possible avenues for improving women's socio-economic development

3.   METHODOLOGY

The methods used in data collection were interviews and self-administered questionnaire. Fifteen women resource centers were visited and the questionnaire administered on their information officers and librarian(s). Where the chief executive or directors of the centers could not be reached, an in-depth interview was conducted with the officer in charge.

The study shows that in carrying out these various activities, certain skills are required by women for effectiveness in contributing to economic development. The study establishes that to acquire practical skills and strategic tools to alleviate sufferings resulting from challenges and problems they face, women have need of education. They will be educated through access to information relevant to their various economic activities.

4.   THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES, RESOURCE AND INFORMATION CENTERS IN MANAGING AND DISSEMINATING INFORMATION FOR WOMEN'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEEDS

The traditional role of libraries is collection, organization and dissemination of information to information-seeking human beings. They get this information in various formats (written, visual, audiovisual and even sometimes realia) and put them or display them in a form in which it is easily retrievable for use. In this new age of Information and Communication Technology, the electronic forms of gathering data are increasingly being used. For women however, there are some problems encountered in the use of information for meeting social and economic needs. This is due largely to the literacy and educational level of the women. In Nigeria, 42% of women are illiterate. This notwithstanding, provision is made for them in development projects. The activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in this regard is particularly noted (Adekanye, 2004). Many women centers organize activities to sensitize women on how to better themselves economically. The work of the wife of the former Head of State of Nigeria, Mrs Maryam Babangida cannot be overlooked. This research now looked specifically at the role of libraries and resource centers in the documentation of women's

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socioeconomic activities and in gathering development information for women in particular. The NGOs involved in women issues were the focus. The library facilities of those that had such were visited, and the librarians interviewed to find out how information for women is gathered and disseminated.

Libraries can positively help in getting women involved in activities that promote their social and economic interests. Information that will be useful to women towards this end would be repackaged for them especially if the women are illiterate or half-illiterate. Training and adult education programmes should be organized by libraries and resource centers especially in rural communities where lack of infrastructure makes it a bit difficult for adequate information to reach women. Wittwer (2001) posits a situation where libraries must balance traditional service with those evolving from new technologies. Like the programme of the Makaseke Multi-purpose Community Center in Uganda, libraries and resource centers serving the rural populace (among them, women and children) should use new information and communication technologies (ICTs) to catalogue development activities. Agricultural information especially should be delivered in time and research results disseminated promptly as well. The community should also be involved in the planning and execution of the activities. (IK-Notes 2000, No.27).

5.   **FACTORS AFFECTING PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO WOMEN**

Dissemination of information to women is dependent on various factors due to the complex and varied nature of the types of information needed. Rathop (2000) in describing the state of gender information in Botswana states that there are mechanisms both governmental and non-governmental to fight the cause of women in that country. He discusses some of the problems faced in providing access to gender information and methods of enhancing its provision. Gender information networking is seen as the answer to this problem. These services can be provided by libraries and resource centers especially women centers. In a network it is easier to disseminate information. Ware (1997) sees the need to develop the communication infrastructure, information systems and services in low and middle income countries. This he feels should be done before provision of aid from International Agencies is provided. The support services of these information systems should be marketed so as to generate interest of the people and also aid in maintenance of the infrastructure.

The issue of national information policies is also a major factor in information provision to women. Information age policies are essential. Developing an information policy is one of the things any government that wants development should tackle first. (Coult, 2001).

In providing information for the needs of women, women librarians are challenged as they are also stakeholders in this effort to gather and disseminate gender information. Iwe (2001) says better information lies in the use of technology and is of the opinion that women librarians are well equipped to face the challenges of the future in the use of technology for information provision. Still on the issue of technology, Carey (2001) argues that ICT will not automatically get to the heart of poverty eradication and exclusion from ICT is deep-rooted exclusion. What the poor need most in his opinion is parallel infusion of money and education. Thus ICT alone cannot help women. Money, the necessary infrastructure and above all, education is needed in addition to any technology proffered. This assures socio-economic development of women and the community as a whole.

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6. WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Now governmental organizations are in the forefront of development project activities and indeed collaborate occasionally with Government Agencies like the Women's Commission which is a ministry in the government. These NGO'S do a lot as their objectives and purpose is to train, educate and assist women in socio economic development activities. A few of these activities are outlined here especially those that are directly concerned with economic development of women:

Centres	Objectives	Activities
1) A) Center for Reproductive Health, Aromatherapy and Development (CEREHAD) B) Centre for Leadership Development (CELDERT)	Promotion of women empowerment through development and capacity building on small scale vocation. Helping drop out youths from high school, move into meaningful, secure and steady employment.	Training: through non formal education of female deoponts, left outs and pushed outs. They are taught vocational skills to earn a decent living. Women are also trained on other issues likely to effect their social living e.g. health, Networking: Collaboration with other news and Government. Information Centre: Operate an information centre but with no professional Librarian in charge.
2) A) Community Women and Development (COWAD) B) Community Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN)	■ To meet the growing needs and aspirations of the less priviledged women of the grassroot communities. ■ Financial assistance to enhance business in form of grants. ■ Provision of non formal education for educationally disadvantaged women and girls to increase their capacity to earn their living	■ Provision of savings and credit services. ■ Supporting Agricultural development ■ Education and training programmes ■ Apiculture ■ Operate information centre which has about 100 information sources through books, conference proceeding etc. The activities of the centres are documented on video and in form of reports.
3) A) Centre for African Settlement Studies and Development	■ Work in advocacy capacity to improve human welfare and quality of settlement in	■ Community development and action projects even as it relate to women. ■ Training programmes

(CASSAD) B) Food Basket International C) Network for Gender Sensitive Educational Management and Administration (NEGSEMA) D) Center for Gender, Governance and Development (CEGGAD) E) National Association of Women in Business	Africa ■ Promote the interest of government and people in sustainable and healthy communities. ■ Promotion of networking among NGO and CBOs (community based organizations).	■ Networking
4) A) Centre for Enterprise Development and Action Research (CEDAR) B) Farmers Development Union (FADU)	■ To operate a "help" centre for a network of people in response to various social, economic and information problems.	■ Self help project development and implementation. ■ Domestic and export market assistance. ■ Gender training. ■ Maintaining an information centre managed by a graduate. Offers reading & lending facilities
5) A) Women's Issues and Development Initiatives (WOMID) B) Women's Research and Documentation Centre (WORDOC) C) Development Policy Centre (DPC) D) Association for Reproductive and Family Health (ARFH)	■ Advocate for women and children on human rights issues. ■ Initiate programmes / economic activities that will enhance the health and development of women and the girl child.	■ Networking with other national and international NGOS. ■ Training programmes. ■ Information centre/library with professional librarian in charge

7. FINDINGS

Of the 30 respondents, 7 (23.33%) were male, and 23 (76.67%) were female. Their occupations ranged from librarian (10% of them), Information officer (40%) to Director of the NGO or Centre (50%). Their highest qualifications were PhD (5%), Master Degree (40%), 1st Degree (20%) and school certificate (35%).

All the centres run programmes for women and girls (100%). Six of the 15 centres (20%) run adult literacy classes, 13 (43.33%) run vocational training programmes, 4 (13.33%) offer farming and extension programmes while 5 (16.67%) of them run catering and home management programmes for women and girls.

Only 2 of the NGO'S (6.67%) get government support in form of occasional grants from the Women's Commission in Abuja. This means that majority (93.33%) do not enjoy government support.

Respondents were of the opinion that women can develop economically by getting loans from cooperatives and agricultural banks. They also believed that the women could also apply for external or foreign grants if assisted with the right support from NGO's and the Women Development Units of the ministries, or the Women's Commission in all states of the Federation.

Concerning libraries or resource centres, 8 (26.67%) respondents only claimed that their organizations had a standard library run by a professional librarian, 16 (53.33%) had resource centres and of this number only 2 (6.67%) had televiewing facilities. 6 (20%) had just a fairly sized book collection available for users. See figure 1.

The types of information gathered in the centres were found to be as follows:-
Information on all subjects are gathered by 6 respondents (20%), information on women and gender issues only are got by 14 respondents (46.6%), Information on economic development only is collected by 8 respondents (26.6%) while information on farming is by 2 respondents (6.67%). See figure 2.

Only 8 (26.66%) of the respondents assist women in getting loans for their farm work or trading activities. The NGO dealing with faming (FADU) was the major giver of this assistance. This may be due to the fact that NGO'S in Nigeria do not often enjoy government support. They depend more on assistance from international agencies and so may not be able to offer loans to women.

When questioned about where they get their information from on an individual basis, it was found that newspapers, magazines and newsletters was the major source followed by lectures/seminars, then interpersonal relaying of information, then libraries, and finally the mass media. The internet was listed as another alternative for getting information.

All the NGOS and centres collaborate occasionally with others. None had ever had collaborative programmes with the government or any ministry or parastatal.
All of them write reports on their activities though not all publish the reports. Only 33.33% do, while 6.67% publish newsletter either biannually or monthly. Majority (80%) record their programmes on audio or videotapes. These tapes are kept in their library for reference purposes.

The information dissemination patterns of the NGO'S are such that efforts to disseminate information through the library are greatest. All of them (100%) disseminate through this medium but the issue is: how many people visit their libraries? 53.33% use the mass media to disseminate their information but this happens only when they have workshops or seminars. The mass media is not used continually to advertise or create awareness of the work of the Centres concerning women. Newspaper and newsletters each come low in the methods of information dissemination (6.67% each). None of the centres use town criers or other traditional methods of information dissemination. None of the centres have a website yet, and though some have computers, none of them are networked and none have internet facilities operating at present. One (1) has a business centre adjacent, so can get information form the internet, but does not use the internet in information dissemination.

8.   THE WAY FORWARD

Library can be used positively as tools for women's socio economic development in the following ways:

1. ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Academic and Research libraries can make available literature of research conducted that is useful to women. They can also maintain a special collection on women and create awareness for such a collection through Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI). Ekpenyong (2001) states that libraries and resource centres can benefit from agricultural research. They can develop a database information system on agricultural activities and their effort will help women in their socio-economic pursuits.

2. SPECIAL LIBRARIES

Libraries owned by Women Development Centres could extract gender – sensitive or gender – based materials in their collection and make them available as well. If the libraries or resource centres are for women and women's collection, then it is necessary for them to establish a network where information can be circulated.

3. GOVERNMENT LIBRARIES

These libraries should be in the forefront of advocating for gender segregated information to be systematically collected and organized. These libraries should be in close contact with the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) of the country so that demographic information is promptly gathered. Government libraries should endeavour to create a database on women and women's issues that can be reliably depended on for planning purposes. With this, planning in all sectors agricultural, information, educational etc is made easier. The National Library of any country is an example of a government library that can be useful.

4. RURAL AND MOBILE LIBRARIES

These types of libraries cannot be overlooked in the provision and dissemination of information to women. Majority of the women in rural areas are illiterate so library services in these areas should be geared towards information provision for them.

5. SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Though school libraries are a bit general in the provision of information; it is in schools that the basis of good reading and information gathering habits are formed. If a child grows up knowing the importance of reading and libraries, the habit carries on for life. The girl child especially needs to be trained or guided specially in the use of libraries and information. She eventually becomes the mother of a generation and what she herself imbibes she gives to her offspring. The role of the school library in information provision cannot be overemphasized.

9.   CONCLUSION

From the study, it is seen that development information is not being gathered systematically. This does not augur well for development in Nigeria.   Development information needs to be delivered in a more convenient, faster, and less expensive fashion so the pace of the information revolution in Nigeria can be enhanced. (Rangi and Munyua, 2000), Policies, partnerships, networking and end user involvement will be necessary to achieve the type of development that is needed.

Libraries and resource centres will have to redouble their efforts to refocus and embrace practical approaches to provision of information to women in order to enhance economic development.

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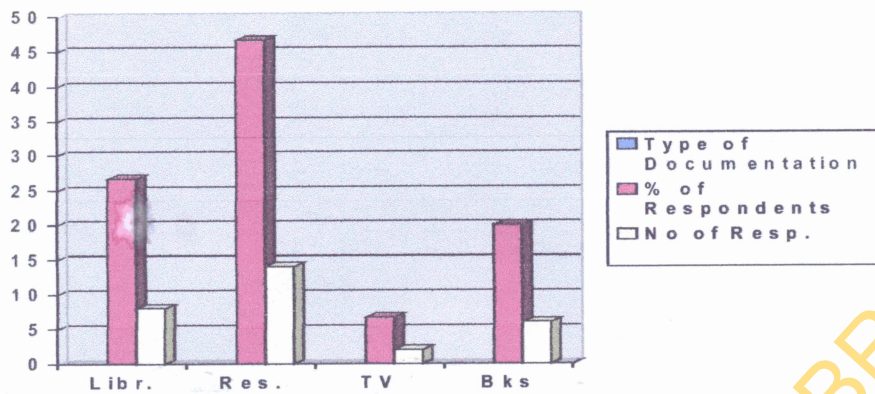
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APPENDICES