

INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AT NIGERIA'S 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Information dissemination as an aspect of knowledge management is very crucial. Information is beneficial only when it is made available in the proper format and at the right time to those who need it. Knowledge in the form of information becomes empowerment in the hands of the receivers propelling them make positive contribution to the improvement of self, the society and the nation.

INTRODUCTION

As the Nigerian nation marks her 50 years of independence, it becomes imperative that some stock-taking must be made as to where the country is presently and where it is heading to. The library profession can best make its contribution to Nigeria's jubilee celebration by x-raying knowledge management and its prospects for the Nigerian Nation. Mutula (2008) defined information as data that has been organized to enhance meaningful interpretation. Also Durant (1957) said that information is turned to knowledge when an individual processes and internalizes it.

According to Fijabi (2001), information is created, presented and retrieved so that it can be passed on to others for their various needs and uses. Information is a very important ingredient of daily activities in the lives of individuals and the society. Important decisions are made based on available information.

Information Dissemination

Dissemination of information is defined as the process of making information available to the public. It is usually initiated or sponsored by the government of a country or an agency authorized for such a purpose. Even though some sources have viewed information dissemination as a one way process which flows from the source to the target audience, Aboyade (1987) maintained that information should flow down from the very top policy makers to the grassroot level and then from the masses to the policy makers to facilitate continuous interaction.

knowledge management is the concept of acquiring, organizing, sustaining and distributing knowledge in such a way as to achieve desired result. While the above is true, information dissemination is an important aspect of knowledge management because knowledge is useless unless it is passed on to those who need it for productivity. Information dissemination is that stage of knowledge management where all necessary information are made available to those for whom such information are meant.

Agents of Information dissemination

There are various agents of information dissemination. Chisenga (1999) identified some institutions as agents of information dissemination to include libraries, museums and archives, non-governmental organizations, universities and research institutions, government, news and media agencies, individual and electronic bibliographic databases. However, for the purpose of this presentation, the agents of information dissemination in Nigeria will be grouped into the following major agents:

- (1) The government and its agencies
- (2) Libraries
- (3) Media agencies
- (4) Educational institutions
- (5) The populace

- (1) The Government is an important agent of information dissemination. Despite the fact that the nation has experienced both military and civilian governments at different times in history, yet information is a factor no government can ignore. So in all the levels of government from the federal, the state, local government and all agents of government, information dissemination has been utilized to acquaint the people of the programmes, policies and action of government. The government also uses it as a means to elicit the support and co-operation of the citizenry. The National Orientation Agency and the Re-branding Nigeria campaign of the Federal Ministry of Information are good examples of information dissemination by government.

(ii) **Libraries:** Over the years, the library has occupied a prominent position as an agent of information dissemination. The library acquires, organizes, preserves and makes information available in book and non-book forms. Indeed, there are different types of libraries and it is apt because each library provides information to its clientele according to the nature of their information needs. The importance of the library in the nation's information system can not be overemphasized. No Nigerian tertiary institution can be accredited by the regulatory body without a standard library in such an institution. This is because of the role libraries play in the provision of knowledge. According to Aguolu (1987) libraries are "veritable responsibilities of knowledge that underpin socio-economics, political, cultural, economic and intellectual forces operating in the society. They are avenues of knowledge that constitute one of the principal instruments in building a richer and better social order"

iii) Media agencies are quick and expensive agents of information dissemination. The media agencies could be print which includes newspapers, magazines, journals etc.

There are also the electronic media which refers to radio and television stations. They carry information straight to the people whom the information is meant for. The media agencies are very effective in information dissemination because of the confidence people have in what they read in the newspapers or heard over the radio, or saw on the television screen. Also the media especially the electronic media has a very wide coverage. The radio and television are common features in most Nigerian homes.

iv) **Educational Institutions:** These include nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Just like the library, the educational institutions provide different levels of information to different cadre of the population. Educational institutions play an important role in information dissemination since they pass knowledge from generation to generation using various teaching methods. The importance of the educational institution lies in the fact that the student usually has confidence in his teacher, so whatever the teacher says must be true.

v) **The populace:** The most interesting of all information dissemination agents is the populace. This refers to individual persons or groups of persons who are not any recognized institutional frame work but yet are very active in information dissemination. Here people who have information tend to share it with either who may not have heard. From one person to another, the

information spreads like wild fire. The agent of transmission is as old as society because as long as people live together in a community, interactions will inevitably lead to information dissemination.

Modes of Information Dissemination

i) **The paper:** The paper has and will continue to be a good mode of information dissemination. The paper is an instrument of writing that has passed from one generation to another. As a mode of information dissemination, it comes in the form of books, pamphlets, brochures publication (reports, newsletter, and briefs), newspapers, magazines, leaflets, posters and so on. It is a simple and less complicated means of communication and information dissemination.

ii) The electronic media is another mode of information dissemination. This includes all those gadgets of communication that are operated with the aid of electricity. They include the radio, the television, the internet and all other electronic devices. They are called audio visuals. Iwuagwu (2009) notes that audio-visuals have the ability to draw and hold attention of the audience more than other modes of information dissemination. In audio-visuals, the eye, the ear and the brain are all focused on the source of information dissemination and this makes assimilation very rapid.

The internet as an audio-visual has great benefits. It is fast and efficient, readily available and easily accessible to users.

Mutula and Mooko, (2006), observed that electronic mail is by far the most commonly used collaborative tool for communication.

v) Another mode of dissemination is through meetings and conferences. In treating the above as means of transferring information, Mutula and Mooko 2006 refer to it as "brainstorming". According to them brainstorming is a method used to generate ideas and refine them using the composite talent and experiences of a group. It is also used as a problem solving and learning technique involving open discussion.

vi) Meetings and conferences provide opportunity for interaction between the sources and the receivers of information. The feedback flow of information is achievable in meetings and conferences.

vii) The word of mouth mode of information is an unconventional, yet a persistent mode of information dissemination. The word of mouth mode comes

in varied forms. Some of them are story telling, oral instructions, physical teaching, hear-say, rumours etc. Mutula and Mooko (2008) identify story telling as an ancient art used for conveying message, promoting values and good morals. Good stories, well told usually make great impact on the audience. Storytelling can permanently change the life of the hearer.

Oral instruction and physical teaching are direct means of information dissemination. There is hardly any barrier existing between the source and the receiver. Hear say and rumor mongering is an inescapable means of information dissemination. Information from this source is not usually verifiable and most times it is not authentic, yet very popular and many people accept to be free carriers of hear-say information.

Benefits of Information dissemination

The benefits of information dissemination will be X rayed from three perspectives:

- (1) The individual/citizens
- (2) The government
- (3) The nation.

(1) Benefits to the individuals/citizens

Individuals in the country have a lot to gain from information dissemination, some of the benefits include:

Agriculture, Health, Education, Civic rights, Productivity and Freedom of information

a. Agriculture is an important aspect of people's life. Without food, a people cannot survive. So information on basic farming skills, new agricultural innovations, information about improved seedlings, the nature and proper use of fertilizers, mechanized farming and all other information about how to produce more food is important to the people.

In Nigeria, many agencies have been involved in research and generation of information on Agriculture. One example is The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), Ibadan.

b. Health is key to good life. Information on health issues are of great benefits to the people. Through information dissemination the people have been educated on communicable diseases like HIV/AIDS virus, its means of

transmission and prevention. Other ailments like Malaria, Cholera, Laser Fever, Bird Flu and so on have at various times received media publicity.

Information dissemination on health issues have helped to eradicate or at least minimally reduce the occurrence of some of the childhood killer diseases in the country like measles, polio, whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus. Also, an agency like National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) have brought succour to people through continuous education on the dangers of fake drugs.

c. **Civic rights:** Civic rights relate to rights of the individual as a citizen of the country especially the right to vote and be voted for. In the elections of 1979, 1985, 1999, 2007, citizens have been educated on how to exercise their right to vote by the different electoral commissions and the mass media. The citizens have by this means been given opportunity to choose their leaders.

d. **Productivity:** The productivity of the people has been enhanced by information dissemination. Acquisition of skills and knowledge empowerment of different kinds are only possible through information dissemination. Every human being is born with talents but these talents can only be developed, and utilized through interaction and information acquisition. Also, unemployed people seek employment using available information.

e. **Freedom of Information:** Marsh (1987) observed that "there are somewhat other reasons why it may be said that the citizens of a democracy ought to be informed about the operations of the executive government. That is because any government allowed to work in secrecy will abuse the power entrusted to it. The second reason is simply that openness of the government process is essential to good government."

2. Government

Even though the government at different levels (in the federal, state and local government) and their agencies are the principal sources of information dissemination, there are benefits accruable to government.

i. Through information dissemination the confidence of the people is gained. The people will trust the government.

- ii. In a democratic system where the government is accountable to the people the programmes, policies and achievements of government are made open to the people for assessment.
- iii. Proper information dissemination eliminates rancour and breakdown of law and order. To a great extent, peace and security will be maintained.

3. The nation

- a. Economic growth
- b. Higher Productivity
- c. National Security

Challenges of information dissemination

1. **Feedback:** Just like every other aspect of knowledge management, information dissemination is a one way process flowing from the source to the audience. There is often no feed back mechanism. Where there is no response from the audience it becomes difficult to ascertain the result from disseminated information.
2. Another major challenge to information dissemination is financial constants. Deformation dissemination costs money and the country being a developing one may not have all the resources to carry out effective dissemination of information to the grass roots. Librarians have suffered most in this aspect as library budget continues to dwindle.
3. **Illiteracy:** This is a major challenge in the country. Due to the falling standard of education in the country, many have attended schools but when it comes to decoding information, they are handicapped.
4. **Power supply:** According to Ojedoku (2008), "in many African countries including Nigeria, frequent power outages constitute a serious bottleneck ... where there are generating plants, the cost of running them is prohibitive".
5. **Government Sanction:** Even though government is the major agent of information dissemination, it is also a fact that government has at sometimes been inhibition to information dissemination. During the military era, information was highly restricted and few journalists and activists who dared to disseminate classified information where either incarcerated or lost their lives.

6. **Ethnic and religious conflicts:** These have seriously hampered to free flow of information in the country. Some states in the country have adopted Sharia law as there substantive legal system. This has made it difficult to spread any other information that is to contrary to the Sharia law in those states where the law is in operation. Ethnic differences have also hampered free flow of information with clashes that have damaged valuable information machinery.

This list is by no means exhaustive as effective information dissemination is often hindered.

The way forward

In order to address barriers hindering access to information, the International Federation of Journalists at its meeting in Nairobi in 2000 recommended that:

- (1) There should be constitutional guarantees for freedom of information without exceptions.
- (2) Governments must repeal laws that limit freedom of information, and to put into place of legal framework that generates freedom of information.
- (3) That everyone has the right to obtain information from public authorities. This right shall apply, regardless of the form in which information is held.
- (4) That in all laws and decisions concerning the right to obtain information, the public interest shall be the first to be considered.
- (5) That exception to the right to obtain information may only apply to clearly and narrowly defined categories of information.
- (6) Those public authorities should establish a central register to enable citizens to locate documents, so that information is easily obtainable.
- (7) Those public authorities should create and preserve records on their activities.
- (8) That if a request for information is denied, sufficient reasons should be given immediately in writing. There should be a right of appeal with a short and defined time scale, against a refusal to disclose information to an independent authority. Upon successful appeal the information should be given, if not, a penalty should be imposed.

- (9) That no official and no journalist may be persecuted, reprimanded or should suffer any loss of status for giving information to the public or to media, when such information is in the public interest.
- (10) That information directly available must be given immediately and not latter than 24hours.
- (11) That once information has been made public, any justification for trying to stop further persecution and dissemination will be overridden by the public's right to know.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that information in the country has been thriving despite several challenges. All thanks to the resilience of librarians, journalists, teachers and all transmitters of information.

The internet has also been instrumental to accelerated dissemination of information.

Recommendations

The following therefore are recommendations for better information dissemination in the country:

- (1) Libraries are agents of information dissemination; they should be well equipped with books and non-book resources including internet facilities for optimal performance.
- (2) Media agencies like newspaper publishers, radio and television stations should be granted financial autonomy and given free hand to practice their profession.
- (3) Government should create an avenue for feedback from the people. Without some form of feedback, it becomes difficult to measure the success or otherwise of information dissemination.
- (4) Information is for productivity. Disseminators of information must tread with caution on matters of national security and other sensitive issues. Information dissemination should be used to promote peace not chaos.

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