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# PUBLIC - PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVES IN RURAL LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES: THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ANAMBRA STATE EXPERIMENTS

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### **Abstract**

*This study uses the structured interview to collect the required data and is designed to evaluate the nature, problems and progress of library and information services to rural communities in Anambra State; the private sector involvement is also assessed. The study covered all the Local Government [twenty in number] Areas in the state within a period of three weeks in June, 2007. The compact nature of the communities coupled with a good network of feeder roads initiated by both the Governor Ngige and the Governor Peter Obi administrations are factors that enhanced the rapid completion of the study within the time frame. The findings indicate that rural libraries and other information services have been established in 13 out of the 210 communities that make the 21 local government areas of the state. Almost all the rural libraries have stock-holdings above 15,000 volumes excluding serials collections and at least 3 professional staff each in its workforce. Suggestions for improvement are proffered, while some other grey areas for further research are also indicated.*

### **Introduction**

Anambra State with its capital at Awka derived her name from the Anambra River which originates somewhere around Idah and empties into the Niger at a point near Nsugbe, after traversing a distance of 209.2 kilometers, [Federal Office of statistics, 1994]. The 2006 census figure is still a matter of controversy nation-wide and many states have rejected the outcome of that exercise. The 1992 census figure however puts the population of Anambra State at 88.9 million, [National Population Commission, as recorded by Federal Office of statistics, 1992].

The major ethnic group is Igbo, although the liberal hospitality of the people enables a large number of other Nigerian ethnic groups to live in peace with them in Anambra State. The land mass is relatively small measuring 4,844 square kilometers or 484,400 hectares. The small landmass of the state renders the communities very compact. People of all walks of life live in various communities in Anambra State. Aina [1987] outlined the categories of people living in a typical rural community in Nigeria as:

- [a] The school population of primary school children and secondary school students;
- [b] Non-literate farmers, craftsmen and women;
- [c] Semi-literate artisans and traders;
- [d] Civil servants, teachers, health officials and other professionals;

The information needs of individuals, groups, organizations and communities will necessarily differ from person to person, from group to group, from organization to organization and from one community to another.

Nwalo [2000] reports that several studies conducted in Nigeria reveal that about 80% of Nigeria's population live in rural areas and over 85% of them are illiterates. However, the data available in the Federal Office of Statistics show that the literacy level in Anambra State is very high. According to this Office which measured the literacy level of the population above 15 years of age, the adult literacy rate for the state is about 77%, with local governments like Onitsha 94%, Ogbaru 92% and Idemili, 85%. Specifically, the local government with the lowest literacy level of 63% is Anambra, [Federal Office of Statistics].

It is against this background that the information needs of the rural dwellers in Anambra State vis-a-vis the infrastructural facilities available for meeting their information needs would be put in perspective.

### **Information Needs of Rural Dwellers in Anambra State**

According to Popoola [2002], some authorities place information needs on a much higher pedestal than ordinary economic resources. Thus, Parker [1973] identifies information as one of the three basic factors that make up a modern environment. The other two are matter and energy. Unlike other economic resources which are scarce [land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship] there is superabundant information and the volume of recorded ones is still growing at an exponential rate. This has led to what has been termed "information explosion" [Becker, 1973 cited by Popoola, 2002].

There are many definitions of information. In fact, authorities are yet to reach a consensus of opinion on the acceptable one. Opara [2004] observes that all available definitions reflect the emphasis and perhaps prejudices of their proponents. Each definition of information appears to be coloured by the academic and/or professional orientation of its proponent. However, Aiyepoku's [1987] definition seems to enjoy the widest acceptance and use. He perceives information as what is used to describe mankind's accumulated knowledge derived from all subjects, in all forms and from all sources that could help its users to reduce their levels of uncertainty. Specifically, information is data structured or processed to be of value in planning and decision-making, in the execution, monitoring and evaluation of the public and private sector programmes of any nation.

Nwalo [2000] believes that it is the availability of relevant information that enables an individual or group to make a decision he will not regret. According to Oderinde [1975] the term 'information need' can best be defined by asking the question "What information would further this job or be recognized as doing so by the recipient?".

'Information need' and 'information demand' are synonymous and are often used interchangeably. 'Information demand' may be defined as the request made as of right. It is always narrower and more specific than 'information need'. That is why Brittain [1971] defines 'information demand' as "that which may be vocal or written and made known to a library or some other information system". Therefore, the demand or need for information has to be expressed in a particular form either orally or verbally by either asking a question or by requesting for it in writing.

According to Popoola [2002] many studies have shown that 'information need' and 'information use' are rather complex issues that must be determined uniquely for specific user groups. Thus, attention can be focused on the spectrum of factors affecting 'information need'. These include the age, educational level, and linguistic ability of the user, as well as factors related to his job, and the subject field of his work.

However, Nwalo [2000] reports that empirical studies have revealed that the information needs of Nigeria's rural communities include:

- [a] how to increase agricultural yields;
- [b] pest and disease control;

- [c] credit and loans to farmers;
- [d] favourable prices for agricultural commodities, and,
- [e] how to obtain government aids.

The above outlined needs are only typical but not exhaustive. Other major needs are bound to exist based on the peculiar locations and circumstances of individual communities. For example, the fishing communities like Aguleri and Ebenebe will naturally require more fishing information, while flood-erosion-prone communities in Anaocha and Aguata local government areas need more information on how to reduce and possibly eradicate these natural problems.

### **Theoretical Framework; Information Perception Constraint Theory of Developing Countries**

This was proposed by Popoola [2002] and it presupposes that policy makers in the less developed countries generally, and Africa in particular, do not have a positive functional perception of hard information in policy analysis and formulation as do their counterparts in the advanced nations. This position is supported by Villars [1985] who stated that the typical literate person in a developing country does not tend to consider information as a problem-solving resource of any practical value or utility. Also, people in developing countries assume that the knowledge and experience needed to solve problems is stored in one's own memory, and that data and information external to one's memory are not important problem solving resources.

Consequently, little importance is attached to the systematic husbanding of such data and information. Several reasons arise from such endemic cultural influences like oral tradition in most developing countries, the high illiteracy rate among the adult population which ensures that the information industry is perceived by a large percentage of the population as elitist, and a luxury; and the fact that a high proportion of today's policy makers and Industrial workers in Africa have never really developed a tradition for the regular use of the institutions' devoted to the analysis and dissemination of hard information, such as are available in libraries, information centres, data centres, documentation centres or archives for their official functions. Barriers to information provision activities are enormous.

The Information highway is still at the embryonic stage and a nonchalant attitude of people and government to information acquisition, processing, storage and utilization is flagrantly exhibited in developing counties.

### **Review of Literature**

Globally, literature is replete with complementary views of writers about the need to reach the rural dwellers with necessary information. For example, Nwalo [2000] maintained that the surest way of raising the standard of life in the rural areas is through the provision of useful and reliable information at the grassroots through library services. Once the people's minds are liberated from superstition and ignorance, they will not only insist on their rights, but will also take advantage of scientific and technological breakthroughs in improving their standards of living. He observed that at present, most libraries in Nigeria are concentrated in urban centres and hoped that the Nigerian Library Association [NLA] would make serious efforts to redress this trend and ensure that rural dwellers have their fair share of library-based information services.

Sinnette [1990] in his book "Information and its users", urged the public libraries to help extend their services to the young people who live in the rural areas, more especially in developing countries, who either for one reason or the other could not complete their educational career, or who were totally not exposed to formal education early in their lives.

Wright [2002] writing under the heading "Information needs of developing countries", stressed the need to back-up information services to rural communities with adequate library services which should encourage books, staff, buildings as well as facilities and that for all the aforementioned services to be made available to the rural dwellers, finance should be the most important factor towards its implementation.

Adimorah [1987] noted that the type of information needed by rural dwellers are very local and specialized and they need information that will enable them tackle their everyday needs. Such information, he enumerated, include the information about where to buy goods and services, where to get good schools for their children, medical services and information on where to contact experts for special jobs.

Tell [1980] specifically advocated a decentralized information dissemination pattern to involved rural populace. He stated that information provision is especially critical in urban areas and emphasized the need to extend such services to our rural areas and other sections of the society that are less privileged.

Smorthy [1975] wondered why information on government activities which is an important part of the national information infrastructure which are located and taken for granted in government and public services and also in services of semi-public sectors, are seldom brought to the grassroots level in a manner whereby its importance would be understood and appreciated.

In Aboyade's [1987] view, development programmes have better chances of success when seen as what people can do together and in order to get the people into this frame of mind, information must reach them at all levels and that is where the rural libraries are required to provide their services to everyone who needs them whenever and wherever they want them.

### **Methodology**

Data needed for this study were mainly collected using structured interviews. This implies that the same questions were asked to all the librarians interviewed. Questions asked sought to clarify issues like how the accommodation was procured, the nature of involvement of the town unions and philanthropic organizations, their stock-holdings, staff strength and their professional status, etc. In all, the 13 libraries that constitute the population were visited.

Direct observations were enabled by visits to the rural libraries by the investigator and where possible, documentary evidence was equally used to bolster the required data.

### **Presentation of Findings**

Table 1: Distribution of Rural Libraries in Anambra State

Apart from the Onitsha Divisional Library, all other libraries in Anambra State including the Anambra State Library Board are regarded as rural libraries because of their location in the rural and sub-urban communities.

**Table 1: Distribution of Rural Libraries in Anambra State.**

S/N	Local Govt.	Rural Libs.	Communities	Accommodation	Approx. Stock holding	Staff Strength
1.	Aguata	1	Ekwulobia	Donated	15000	7
2.	Ayamelum	-	-	-	-	-
3.	Anambra	-	-	-	-	-
4.	Anaocha	1	Adazi-Nnukwu	Donated	18,000	8
5.	Awka South	1	Amawbia	Donated		-
6.	Dunukofia	1	Ifite-Dunu	Rented	60,000	60
7.	Ekwusigo	2	Ozubulu/ Ihemposi	Donated	16,000	7
8.	Idemili North	-	-	-	-	-
9.	Idemili South	-	-	-	-	-
10.	Ihiala	-	-	-	-	
11.	Njikoka	2	Abagana/Nimo	-	-	-
12.	Nnewi North	1	Amichi	Donated	16,000	10
13.	Nnewi South	1	Nnewi	Rented	25,000	22
14.	Ogbaru	1	Atani	Rented	15,000	7
15.	Onitsha North	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Onitsha South	-	-	-	-	-
17.	Orumba North	2	Ajalli / Nkpologwu	Donated Donated	18,000 16,000	8 9
18.	Orumba South	-	-	-	-	-
19.	Oyi	-		-	-	-

### Discussion of Findings

*Ekwulobia Community Library*; This community library is at present located in the Women's Hall in the compound of St. John's Anglican Mission, along Orlu Road, Ekwulobia. The library was established by the Ekwulobia community, and it has not yet been completely taken over by Anambra State Library Board. Although a catalogue cabinet is provided, the books have not been fully catalogued and classified. Its

collection of approximately 15,000 volumes is rich in fiction and the sciences. A children's section is lacking.

*Adazi-Nnukwu Community Library:* This library came into existence purely as a result of the community's initiative. Adazi-Nnukwu indigenes at home and in diaspora, particularly those in the United States of America, donated large volumes of books to the Town Union for the development of a community library. Consequently, an age grade called Umuife Age Grade donated their building for this project. The library is located very close to the Afor Market Square in the centre of the town.

Although a catalogue cabinet is provided, yet there is no evidence of cataloguing and classification. Books on different subjects are lumped together on the shelves. There are about 13000 volumes and the library has also about 30 serial titles. The collection is very strong in the areas of management sciences, medicine and nursing.

It has about 7 members of staff, and staff remuneration is still a joint responsibility of both the community and the Anambra State Library Board, by which the Library Board pays 3 of its staff while the community pays the rest.

It has one computer set but constant power outage has even rendered its use ineffective.

*Anambra State Library Board, Amawbia Branch:* The land donated by the Amawbia community in 1978 along Nise - Agulu road for the erection of a befitting library still lies fallow. There is no infrastructure on the ground. The temporary accommodation they had provided for library services and the books there were transferred to the Abagana Divisional Library.

*The State Library Board Headquarters, Ifite-Dunu:* The Library section of the Board provides library services to both Ifite-Dunu and its neighbouring communities. It is a temporary accommodation provided by the government in the premises of St. Mary's High School, Ifite-Dunu. The state-wide central administration is located there but accommodation problem still impedes the development of full-scale library services.

*Anambra State Library Board, Ozubulu Branch:* The Ozubulu Brothers Club donated the first floor of their club house called Pioneer Hall to the State Library Board. The staff of the library are controlled by the state headquarters of the board. The books are catalogued and classified. There is an equipped children's section. The collection is approximately 16,000 volumes. The library is remarkable for its stock of government

publications. One of its main problems is its location close to a very busy Ugwu-Oye market square.

*Anambra State Library Board, Ihemboosi Branch..* The Ihemboosi Social Club, Ekwusigo Local Government Area in 1979 donated their club house, including an electric generating set to the Anambra State Library Board for library and information services. The library was officially opened in 1980 and houses the Children Library, an adult section, the administration and a large reading room.

*The Divisional Library Abagana:–* This library is located on the first floor of the Chime Memorial Hall, Orofia, Abagana which inherited the stock and equipment of the Amawbia Divisional Library. This was in May 1992. The Board rented the community hall for its services and at present it has both an adult and children's sections. Its collection will be about 17,000 volumes and the books are catalogued and classified. About 10 different journal titles are displayed including some government publications.

*The Nimo Community Library:* This library is located in the Catholic Women's Organisation [CWO] hall of Assumption Catholic Church Nimo, along Nimo - Neni road. The whole project is undertaken by Nimo community under the aegis of the Nimo Brotherhood Society [NBS]. Apart from the empty hall space, there is no other infrastructure on the ground and at present the State Library Board has not even been approached for either partnership or assimilation.

*The State Library Board, Ajalli Branch [Obu Branch Library, Ajalli]:*Th\ s library was donated by Mr. Hilary Obu and was officially opened in 1979. It has both children's and adult sections and stocks about 18,000 volumes. There is a piece of land also donated by the community at its inception for the building of its permanent site.

The State Library Board has staffed and equipped the library and had taken over the management since then.

*The State Library Board, Nkpologwu Branch:* This library project was initiated by the Umezina family which built the library and donated it to the State Library Board. Mr. Chris Ekweozor [1984] a one-time Director of Anambra State Library Board writes that all the books in that library at that time were donated by the Overseas Book Company of Canada through the State Ministry of Education.

*The State Library Board, Amichi Branch* This project was initiated by an Age Grade of the town. The Ndulue Age Grade donated the building with tables, chairs, shelves and books to the State Library Board. It was opened on 16<sup>th</sup> August, 1984 by Dr. Paul Modum, the then Commissioner for Information Social Development, Youths, Sports and Culture of the former Anambra State.

Other private libraries are springing up here and there in the state. For example there are the NYSC Pilot Library at Awka, the Ejeckam Library at Isulo, the Nise Community Library and the ichi Community Library. The purpose of all these community libraries is to provide information at the grassroots by creating, collecting, organizing, storing, analyzing, finding, sending and using information.

### **Conclusion**

The rural library and information service network in Anambra State has spread among 13 out of the 21 local government areas in the state. This is a commendable development, but one still observes that there is much room for improvement. Other communities in Ayamelum, Anambra, Idemili North & South, Ihiala, Orumba South, Oyi and Onitsha South should also be reached with library and information services thereby enabling the rural dwellers appreciate the value of information in our collective social and national life.

### **Recommendations**

1. Despite the unfavourable economic climate in the country it is very important to realize the need to provide information to the rural dwellers; this can only be achieved by combined efforts of the private and public sectors.
2. Mobile library services which appeared moribund in Anambra State after the Civil War should be revitalized by the government by injecting more funds into it so as to complement the efforts of rural dwellers to enjoy library services.
3. Library extension services of all types should be reinvigorated to reach the remotest communities in the state.
4. Although library automation projects, even in very academic libraries in Nigeria, remain a wild goose chase, because of poor planning and execution, we shall not give up, but rather continue to look forward to the possibilities of computerizing these rural library services.

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