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BUILDING LOYALTY FOR EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF INFORMATION PRODUCTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concepts of loyalty and information products as well as the various strategies for building users' loyalty considering the unenviable state of information provision and utilization in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State. The paper advocates that one route to achieving loyalty is to understand the various audiences in rural communities and the types of information demanded. That means, the information managers, commonly known as librarians, have a great role to play in information utilization vis a vis building loyalty of information users. This paper therefore presents various skills required of information managers in order to guarantee effective use of information products at their disposal. In other words, information managers need to be skilful and competent in matching information products with the right user at the right time in the right environment. The paper also reveals the different structures present in rural communities, through which information products can be delivered to realize users' loyalty. In the end, the paper recommends, among others, that Government, NGOs, and Individuals should establish formal structures like libraries, information centres, etc for effective information dissemination in rural communities. Also, the existing structures should be totally revamped to support effective information provision and utilization in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State.

Keywords: *Loyalty, Information Products, Information Utilization, Rural Communities*

INTRODUCTION

Loyalty, though an old fashioned word traditionally used to describe commitment and enthusiastic devotion to a country, a cause, or individual, is recently used in many contexts including information services delivery. For instance, loyalty could be used to describe an information user's willingness to continue patronizing information centres or libraries over time, preferable on an exclusive basis, and also recommending the centre's information products to friends, colleagues, researches, relatives, etc. Information products are those physical goods and services and even ideas whose core or primary contents is information. That is to say, information products include information resources, services, and ideas offered to users with the bid to enhance knowledge generation, dissemination and acquisition.

Access to information products is critical to rural communities where the dwellers need to know their rights and entitlements, and sources of support to overcome social exclusion and economic inefficiency. In other words, information in whatever form is vital in the daily life of rural dwellers. The prosperity, progress, and development of any rural community depend on its dwellers' ability to acquire, access, and use pertinent information for current awareness, recreational purposes, and problem solving in all sectors of human endeavour (Aina, 2006). Although, rural dwellers are dominantly peasant farmers, there are petty traders, business men, commission agents, and few civil servants as in the case of Akwa Ibom State.

Akwa Ibom is a state in Nigeria located in the coastal South-Southern part of the country with a land mass of 6,900 sq Km. The state has a population of about 3.92 million people with rural communities taking the larger percentage of the population. The state is made up of 31 Local Government Areas with 115 clans consisting of 2,250 villages (Philip and Abia, 2012). Notwithstanding the fact that some rural communities in Akwa Ibom state are experiencing uncommon transformation, to an extent, in the area of schools renovations, pipe borne water provisions, road network, healthcare services, etc. Indeed, the government, for the past 7 years has recorded landmark infrastructural development but the issue of information acquisition and dissemination seems to be neglected especially in rural communities. As such, information hunger is prevalent and biting hard on these communities, and this has resulted in poor living conditions, illiteracy, poverty, and inadequate amenities of life. That is to say, lack of effective information system or structure in rural communities remains the reason to lack of better personal, social, educational and economic life of the

inhabitants. This could serve as a cardinal point for information managers to identify the various types of information seekers or users in rural settings, identify their information needs, and develop strategies for effective information dissemination with the hope of building the users' loyalty.

Concept of Loyalty

Loyalty could be regarded as an interaction of attitude and behaviour. According to Hornby (2010), loyalty is defined as the quality of being faithful in support of somebody or something. In other words, loyalty is exhibited through person's behaviour and attitude towards something or somebody. For instance, loyalty, as regards an information setting, is put on display through the use of information products available in the information structure. Information structure could be regarded as any physical framework through which information is made known or disseminated to the right user. Such structures include library, information centres, documentation centres, resource centres, etc. However, loyalty of a user is not only associated with the frequency of patronage but also with the user's attitude towards services delivery, which reveals his/her level of contributions or commitment. This means, when users provide suggestions, donations, opinions that could enhance services delivery, it reveals their commitment as well as loyalty.

To Dick and Basu cited in Rowley (2006), loyalty is determined by the strength of the relationship between comparative attitude and frequent patronage which has both attitudinal and behavioural elements. On the basis of the attitude-behaviour relationship, the authors propose four conditions, otherwise could be regarded as categories of loyalty. The categories, which are loyalty, latent loyalty, spurious loyalty, and no loyalty, are presented and discussed below:

		Frequent patronage	
		High	Low
Comparative attitude	High	Loyalty	Latent loyalty
	Low	Spurious loyalty	No loyalty

Figure 1.1 Definitions of Categories of Loyalty

Source: Rowley (2006)

- The first category is loyalty which reveals a favourable association between comparative attitude and frequent patronage. This explains the fact that when a user is scored high in attitude and high in frequent patronage there is an envisaged loyalty.
- The next category is latent loyalty which represents a high comparative attitude with low patronage. This simply means that a user whose attitude is rated high but with low patronage displays latent loyalty.
- Spurious loyalty, as the third category, is associated with low comparative attitude but high patronage. This category of loyalty is revealed when a user's attitude is low but the frequent patronage is high.
- The fourth and last category is no loyalty which shows a low comparative attitude, combined with low patronage. This reveals that when a user exhibits a low attitude as well as a low patronage, it therefore means that such user has no loyalty.

From the foregoing, every information provider that is loyalty conscious should always aim at achieving high level of commitments and patronage of those that are using the information available.

Concept of Information Products

Information, according to Idaa (2012), has its root from the Latin word *informatio*. The concept involves two basic contexts: the act of moulding the mind and the act of communicating knowledge. That means, information is that structured data which are required to enable one act knowledgeably as well as take appropriate decisions. Indeed, information is the basic instrument for prosperity, progress, and development of any community, be it rural or urban. When information is recorded, packaged, or re-packaged it results in information products. Rowley (2006) explains that information products are not only the information materials but also the services which are the activities and even the ideas that could bring about desired result in the entire information system. Suffice to say that information product is any product (either information resource or service) whose core or primary content is information or knowledge.

Basically, information resources as information products are broadly classified as print and non-print. As the name implies, the print are those information resources that contain information in printed format, whereas

the non-print contain information in non-paper based format which could only be accessed via ICT facilities (Akwang, 2013). Information resources include books, periodicals, reference sources, government publications, pictures, newsletters, pamphlets, electronic information resources, etc. On the other hand, information services are those activities that involve the application of professional skills in the provision and dissemination of information to satisfy the needs and expectation of users (Onu and Ijezie, 2010). Notably, a wide range of information services are at any information structure's disposal to ensure that the information resources are made available for optimal use. Such services include current awareness services, document delivery services, strategic (selective) dissemination of information, repackaging services, reprographic services, question and answer services, Internet services, reference and referral services, among others. However, information product needs to be judged by some of the underlying characteristics to ascertain its quality and usability.

The characteristics that form the basis for assessment of information products are widely recognised. They include objectivity, accessibility and form, relevance, currency and lifespan, structure, and organisation. Information users often judge objectivity of information on the basis of reliability and accuracy. Accessibility and form could be determined by the availability, significance, and medium through which the information product is made available to users. Related to the issue of relevance is the level of details and completeness of the information product which must match the users' requirement. Currency and lifespan could be judged on the base of lifecycle and rate of obsolescence of information product. This explains the fact that current information product has to be provided and the outdated ones discarded or weeded. The structure and organisation of information products could be assessed on the basis of the arrangement or organisation of such products to reflect the subject classification and services needs. Uhegbu (2007) posits that the utilization of information products is influenced by the job done, profession, or function one performs. In addition, factors like user, goal, information environment, availability, communication channel and satisfaction play significant role in information products' utilization. That means, apart from the information manager and staff that are providing the products, information users do have to contribute to information flow and utilization. Users need to understand themselves in the context of responsibilities, literacy level, information needs, information seeking behaviour, and other personal characteristics in the bid to enhance utilization of information products. Also, the facilities provided to support the entire information system relate with the quality of services delivery. In other words, building users' loyalty through information services delivery could greatly be influenced by the quality of physical or infrastructural facilities present in the information environment.

However, access to quality information products remains the key resource for rural communities in maintaining active, prosperous, and independent life. In assertion, Diso (2005) posits that rural dwellers need relevant, efficient, and current information. Whether they are literate or not, they should have access to any kind of information which could help them to be productive in their social and political obligations in addition to becoming better informed citizens generally (Okoye, 2003). This brings the fact that without proper access and use of information products, rural dwellers cannot benefit from the global technological, scientific, and economic innovations and developments.

Information Demands in Rural Communities

In most developing countries, rural communities constitute the larger percentage of the population whose information demands are many and multidimensional according to the activities of diverse audiences. Although, most activities in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State are agricultural based, but it is very important to look at other activities in other to determine the totality of their information demands if building users' loyalty is to be achieved. To this end, Okoye (2003) and Harande (2009) provide different categories of information demands of rural communities in Nigeria including Akwa Ibom State as information related to neighbourhood, health, agriculture and allied occupations, education, housing, employment, transportation, religion, recreation and culture, welfare and family matters, legal matters, policies and government, and so on. However, for better understanding and clarity, the above-mentioned information areas may be grouped as follows:

- **Policy and General Rural Development:** Rural dwellers need both national and international policies in order to have basic hands-on information on different aspects related to rural development. Such policies include donors' policies, decentralization policies, and natural resource management, *et cetera*. In addition, information about general rural development or neighbourhood which may relate to water supply, electricity supply, environmental sanitation,

refuse disposal, road maintenance and drought helps the rural dwellers in solving problems related to the areas in question.

- **Agriculture Information and Technologies:** These include information on improved seeds varieties, soil conservation, prevention of plants and animal disease, fertilizer application, farm machineries, processing technologies, and so on. This group of information is tailored to practical skills acquisition which could be provided in different formats suitable for the users' level of literacy and language. It is often available in books, journals, manuals, or technical fact-sheets as well as in non-print format.
- **Commercial and Market Information:** This category of information covers prices, distribution channels, suppliers, outlets, custom regulations among others. Although, this information may not be of high demands in most rural communities, but they are relevant and should be provided to satisfy the needs of interested users, especially those that are literate or neo-literate. At most times, the source of such information has to be verified to determine its authenticity before acquisition, processing or packaging, and dissemination of same to interested users.
- **Legal and Fiscal Information:** This group of information constitutes official publications which contain laws that affect the citizens of a country including the rural dwellers. Such laws are enacted by the government as guide to issues like marriage, childcare, juvenile delinquency, land tenure system, acquisition and transfer of land, taxation, investment opportunities, banking and other financial activities. Rural dwellers need to have relevant information that will instigate in them, proper conduct in the society and freedom from any criminal involvement.
- **Education and Health Information:** Education information includes all types of information resources that could enhance the standard of education in rural settings. Such information on innovations and changes in school management, teaching and learning processes, infrastructural facilities, and job and scholarship opportunities. Other relevant information that could arouse the interest of the illiterates and semi-illiterates towards schooling falls under this category. Health information which relates to personal and environmental hygiene, prevention of minor or serious ailment, awareness of available healthcare delivery centres, and cost of accessing the services is necessary to be made available to rural dwellers.
- **Orientation and Addresses:** This category of information provides address of suppliers, exporters, and resource organisations that could be of interest to rural dwellers in different fields. Generally, such information is often followed by explanations and or comments for further clarification and understanding. However, this category of information requires constant contact and update to ensure its authenticity.

Considering the above-listed areas, it is obvious that information, provided directly or repackaged, is needed by virtually all the rural inhabitants engaging in different human endeavours. That means, building users' loyalty can only be possible and effective when the information demands or needs of the various audiences in rural communities are met positively.

Various Audiences in Rural Communities

Rural community, according to Ajayi (2003) could be defined as any area with a population of about 20,000 people or below which serves as the base for the production of food and fibre. The author identifies three basic types of rural communities which include village, hamlet, and homestead. The village has many houses, schools, health centres, shops, and in rare cases information centres. It is situated away from the cities with access roads to link the different areas within the village and other regions around it. Village could be linear, dispersed, or nucleated. Hamlet contains few houses usually, less than a hundred with many people living in them. Hamlet is mostly nucleated. Homestead, on the other hand, is typically a few family residences with less or no opportunity for social gathering. It has a dispersed arrangement separated from one another by bushes or geographical barriers. Be that as it may, rural communities are noted as the major sources of capital formation for the country, a principal market for domestic manufacturers, and a source of food to the entire nation.

Despite the importance attached to the rural communities, their information needs are not adequately met and consequently, the level of development is abysmally low. According to Douglas (2012), there is absence of infrastructures which could have improved the quality of life of the dwellers. Rural communities are characterised by epileptic or no electricity supply, near-total absence of industries, absence of portable water and good feeder roads, lack of social amenities, and lopsided demographic configuration in most areas. Also, the scarcity of learning facilities including books, journals, videos and audio cassettes, and other learning materials show a critical situation. Perhaps, the major reason for the underdevelopment could be total

absence or inadequate information centres or and libraries. Above all, the inability of the public libraries to meet the rural dwellers information needs through extension services. It is one of the functions of public library and other information structures to serve those in rural communities with information that could help them function efficiently in the society. Whatever the case may be, building loyalty demands that information managers understand the information needs of the various audiences in rural communities to include the following:

- **Subsistent Farmers:** This group is also referred to as low scale farmers which comprise both crop and livestock farmers with limited financing capacities. They farm on small parcels of land using crude farm tools and human power. And their farm products are mostly for home consumption and sometimes sell a little bit to augment their daily expenses. This audience constitute the largest population of rural dwellers that is generally characterised by poor education. Despite the fact that some of them are literate in only local language(s), majority can neither read nor write. For such reason, they need mostly technical information presented in form of videos, local or translated radio programmes, and extension visuals like drawings or pictures.
- **Mechanised Farmers:** They are often known as large scale farmers with large hectares of land where they farm crops and livestock using machines and human power. They farm for commercial purposes and means of livelihood. Majority of this population are people with secondary or higher education who are sufficiently proficient in reading and writing. They need mostly technical, financial, and commercial information which is better presented in summarised, short, practical, and illustrated forms for easy comprehension.
- **Craftsmen or Artisans:** This is another group of rural dwellers who engage in activities involving a special skill on making things with hands. Such people, though few in number, make beautiful baskets, seats, beds, hats, bags, etc using local raw materials like canes and raffia. Some of them produce quality designs of art pieces by hand using thin pieces of wood and other materials. This audience requires mostly technical, commercial, and financial information and sometimes orientation to promote the available unfamiliar but relevant information services.
- **Food Processors:** This group specialises in the processing of food using human power, locally made machines and skills that are not formally acquired. This group of rural dwellers, in any rural setting, process raw materials into finished products. Most of them process cassava into garri, foo foo, tapioca, etc and palm fruit into palm oil, black oil, palm kernel meals, etc. This audience needs technical information - which can enhance their processing skill, market information, and financial information.
- **Small and Medium Scale Enterprises:** This audience includes all the rural dwellers who engage in production of products, that is, the creation of commodities that, either directly or indirectly, will turned into food or drink for human consumption. Examples include enterprises that produce, in a fairly large scale, products like ice cream, illicit drinks, sachet water, chalk, starch, etc within the rural communities. Basically, this audience needs both local and foreign information that is well targeted and immediately operational such as legal, managerial, commercial, technical and financial information.
- **Professional Associations:** This audience includes all unions, clubs, and groups officially joined together for a particular purpose. They need mostly commercial, financial, and policy information contained in books, reflection documents, policy summaries and so on. In clear terms, these associations need to be up-dated in order to meet the information demands of their varied members.
- **Support and Advice Organisations:** This group includes all the training, supervision, NGOs, consultants, management centres, and extension organisations available within and around the rural communities. These structures that provide support and advice needed by other groups of dwellers have varied information needs, ranging from technical to policy implementation. They need practical information in form of research results, reflection documents, and policy summaries of regional, national, and international background.
- **Teachers and Students:** Notwithstanding the fact that some educational institutions (nursery, primary, secondary, and tertiary) in rural communities have libraries with less than expected information products. Teachers and students visit specialised information centres, other libraries, and documentation centres for technical, scientific and general information of interest.
- **Other Civil Servants:** Most rural communities have the presence of government institutions like ministries, agencies, and other parastatals. Staff of such institutions needs general and specialised

information resources in their respective areas of specialization in order to be relevant in the society.

- Retirees: This group of rural dwellers who served as public or civil servants in government institutions at different capacities and returned to their villages after retirement. They need mostly health and recreational information to keep fit and strong. However, other types of information could be relevant to them.

Strategies for Building Users' Loyalty

According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2011), building loyalty of the various audiences (users) could be difficult but it is necessary and possible. The authors note that managers of various organisations including library, information centres, etc can use a framework known as the Wheel of Loyalty to build up the loyalty of the users. This framework comprises the following three sequential strategies:

- Building a foundation for loyalty: Considering the various audiences available in rural communities, information managers need to identify and target the right audience (s), identify and match their information demands with the available resources, and determine the types of services offerings to be introduced, changed or enhanced to guarantee a high level of users' satisfaction.
- Creating loyalty bonds: In addition to building a solid foundation for loyalty, information managers need to develop ways that could assure close bond with the users through the provision of state of the art facilities, reading environment conducive for learning, and adequate quality conscious personnel. Higher bonds could be ensured by offering creative and innovative services which may not be common in other information structures.
- Eliminating users' defections: At this point, the information manager is more concern with overcoming the obstacles that could lead to low or no patronage. The obstacles or deficiencies may be caused by internal or external factors. However, they need to be identified and eliminated to ensure quality services performance and users' satisfaction. Such deficiencies may include scantiness of relevant resources, lack of staff commitment, inadequacy of infrastructural facilities, shortfall of staff, lack of innovations in services delivery, poor reward system, ineffective users' complaint handling and obnoxious policies, and so on.

Given these antecedents, it might be suggested that information managers need to consider the images and expectations that the users hold in respect to the nature and quality of services provided. According to Broady-Preston and Steel (2002), construction and retention of images and expectations may be achieved through up-dated and organised information resources and services.

The emotions and levels of satisfaction provoked by these services should be another aspect of great concern to information managers. Most times, it is observed that users express low satisfaction with the present and future information offerings (products) especially in rural communities. This low level of satisfaction could be raised by understanding the behavioural patterns of the diverse users which of course are subject to change. Many studies, as noted by Lovelock and Wirtz (2011), reveal that behavioural pattern of users exert influence on the level of loyalty. Therefore, factors that could evoke and sustain positive change in the users' behaviour need to be taken into consideration when building loyalty. Such factors, according to the source include proximity of the services environment, quality facilities, attractive products, affordability and accessibility of the services, operating hours, creative and innovative skills, among others.

Skills of Information Managers in Rural Communities

Information managers are mostly professionals trained in librarianship and commonly known as librarians. They are saddled with the responsibilities of collecting, preserving, and disseminating information efficiently in the bid to match the available information products with appropriate users (Edet, 2007). That means, information managers are indispensable tools where building users loyalty is paramount. Suffice to say that the effectiveness and outward image of any information centre or library is fashioned more by the competence of its manager. The fact that the manager organises, directs, and controls the total activities of the library, means that it is his/her competence that governs the effectiveness with which the information product is delivered. Therefore, every information manager with his/her team should possess relevant skills that could guarantee information use. Such skills, according to Uhegbu (2007), centre on the processing, organisation, packaging and repackaging of information. However, information managers should possess the following skills:

- Ability to conduct needs assessment. There are several information products available and not all are good, relevant and suitable to all audiences in rural communities. It is the duty of information managers and other staff to needs assessment of rural communities to be able to select those

products that will satisfy the interest of the prospective users. In conducting needs assessment, the situational and environmental aspects relating to the information utilization should be considered alongside the users characteristics.

- Ability to identify the target users and their demands. Once the needs are properly assessed, information managers with other staff should be able to identify the target users or audience and its information demands. A strategy has to be explicitly defined for this purpose not only to guide against inappropriate acquisitions but also poor patronage and services ineffectiveness, among others.
- Ability to match the users to the right type(s) of information. The heterogeneous nature of rural communities suggests many categories of users and varied information needs or demands. It is the responsibility of every information manager to identify the audience information need and match with the available products. In doing this, the type of audience, the type of information sought, and the primary reading skills needed for the information utilization must be determined.
- Ability to repackage information to meet the users' needs. The issue of building users loyalty centres on a lot of factors but mostly on the actual use of the information products. Uhegbu (2007) notes that if information is to be used effectively by rural dwellers, the information managers need to acquire the skills and competence needed for repackaging of information that appears in languages and formats that are strange to the prospective users. Repackaging helps in eliminating physical or social encumbrances without compromising quality and content of such information. Utilization of information can be made a great deal easier if its content, language, or medium is repackaged to suit the interest and understanding of the local users. This is to say, information managers need to be creative and innovative in services delivery.
- Ability to identify the existing local information supply. Knowledge of the information already available locally is essential for building users loyalty. This local investigation gives information managers an idea of the context in which the target audience operate, and provides clues on their information needs, what is missing, and problems encountered in accessing information. This could enable the information provider (library or information centre) to position its products in relation to other existing products.
- Ability to identify and cooperate with other change agents and local power elites. It is believed that in any rural community, there are agents and elites that are working assiduously, either individually or collectively, to effect the desired change in the life of the dwellers. Consequently, information managers need to liaise with change agents taking into account the donor agencies or institutions in the urban areas as well as those in the major agricultural zones. Also, relevant contacts through interviews, discussions, and meetings with the local power elites in the locality are necessary to be able to create a network of relationships that could support information utilization.
- Ability to monitor and evaluate the entire information system. This calls for proper monitoring and evaluation of the staff productivity level, the users' attendance rate, and the available infrastructure. This exercise establishes the effectiveness of the information system, the level of users' satisfaction, the management efficiency as well as the sustainability of the facilities provided. Library managers need to adopt monitoring tools that will provide dependable and reliable results capable of building users loyalty.
- Ability to use ICT facilities. With the emergence of ICT, information structures are now able to provide to users quality resources and services unconstrained by distance, time, and revolution. That means, information managers who provide these resources and services must acquire relevant ICT skills by discovering the ICT tools, learning how to use the ICT tools, understanding how and when to use ICT tools for a particular task, and specialising in the use of the ICT tools (Subramanyam, 2008). The skills facilitate access to information electronically through Internet, Usenet, Telnet, e-mail, mobile phones, among others. In other words, information managers with ICT skills could link rural dwellers to up-to-date and dependable online information on every area of need provided there are supportive facilities in the rural communities.

Ways of Information Dissemination in Rural Communities

There are several ways or strategies of ensuring that the right information gets to the right person in a format that could guarantee effective utilization and users' satisfaction. Information managers can adopt one or a combination of these strategies to achieve a desired goal. In any case, the choice of any strategy is strongly determined by the user's educational level, age, query, profession, location, and sometimes gender. Other

significant determining factors are the services means and ability of the information manager among others. However, the following are ways of disseminating information to rural dwellers:

- **Oral Tradition:** One effective medium of information dissemination in rural communities using traditional approach is identified as oral tradition (Aboyade, 1985). The richness of oral tradition is noticed in almost every aspect of living, from the use of leisure and pursuit of occupations to socialization of children, and the organization and good governance at local level. Through oral tradition like new yam festivals and water yam festivals performed in most rural areas including Essien Udim, Ikot Ekpene, Ikono, and Abak Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State, agricultural information is presented by experienced elders to farmers, thus, revealing the techniques on how to plant crops for improved yields. Such information could be documented, repackaged, preserved and delivered to meet information needs.
- **Document Delivery:** This method involves the handing over of needed information resources to users in its original form without tampering with the format and contents. Document delivery remains the most widely used in rural communities but certainly not the most appropriate and effective. In most cases, information is presented in forms and formats that do not make meaning to most rural dwellers, perhaps due to their educational level. They find it difficult to understand the contents of books, journals, newspapers, magazines, tapes, posters, and other information resources available. Therefore, the content of such documents needs to be interpreted, narrated and sometimes recorded in a familiar medium of communication to ensure that information provided is in the right language and format that will guarantee effective utilization.
- **Radio and Television:** Disseminating information through radio and television seems to be quite suitable for rural communities. This could be because most dwellers can neither read nor write but they can listen and watch. Radio and television with their great flexibility and adaptability keep people informed and entertained. The content of radio and television programmes which revolve around music, news, announcements, talks, advertisements, etc should be targeted for audiences in both urban and rural communities. Effort to disseminate knowledge on relevant topics like agricultural practices, environmental sanitation, sports (football) and family planning services via these media need to be linked also to the information demands of rural communities. Sometimes, information managers have to translate, record, and play back such programmes to various audiences in rural communities for effective utilization.
- **Videos and Film Shows:** These are modern and veritable media that could be adopted in disseminating information to rural dwellers. According to Kenneth (2002), video and film show visually demonstrate new ideas and techniques that could increase awareness about specific developmental problems. That means information managers can prepare videos of some presentations on community development concerns and preserve them for future use. Also, film shows on targeted issues can enhance the knowledge level of rural dwellers as well as increase their commitment and patronage.
- **Seminar and Workshop/ Talk Presentation:** These are methods of delivering detailed information in a more formal situation. They present ideas in clear and practical terms provided they are well-delivered and organised. Information managers need to, though less frequently, organise seminars, workshops, and talk presentations, inviting experienced and qualified resource persons to teach on methods or processes of getting things done in a way the rural inhabitants will understand better. It could be on education, agriculture, environment, health, social, employment, sanitation, and other related issues. This could certainly provide the rural dwellers opportunity to acquire hands-on experience that could help them improve on a lot of targeted activities.

Structures for Information Dissemination

One way of identifying rural communities is near total absence of libraries or information centres, except for the unequipped libraries found in some of the educational institutions available. Notwithstanding the odd situation, there are structures that could be used, sometimes at regular schedule, for information dissemination in rural communities. Such structures include the following:

- **Town Halls:** Every village has a town hall constructed with a fairly large capacity to accommodate many people. Information managers can schedule for a meeting there to disseminate information products relevant to the users demand. This arrangement could be made possible with the village council's approval, the means of providing such services and the provider's convenience.

- **Village Square and Market Squares:** These serve as important structures for information dissemination in rural areas. The inhabitants could be summoned to gather for information which may be social, economic, political, cultural, or recreational.
- **Primary Health Centres and Hospitals:** In most rural communities, there are health centres or hospitals which could be used in disseminating other types of information apart from the usual health information. For instance, information managers could distribute condensed information materials which spell out the location and information activities or services available within the community to literate patients. By so doing, awareness is created and this could bring about increased usage of information resources within the disposal of information providers
- **Schools:** Every school, primary, secondary or tertiary situated in any community is expected to have a functional library established to provide a wide range of information to students, teachers and other members of the institution. Therefore, it becomes possible for every member to access books, journals, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, and other materials to meet their educational information demands.
- **Information Centres or Resource Centres:** These are centres established to provide information resources and services to a distinctive class of people with identifiable information needs. Information or resource centres are mostly set up by NGOs, agencies, and individuals with the aim of aiding research and development in specific areas of need. Ideally, notable foreign and local organisations, agencies, and institutions like WHO, ECEWS, UNICEF, Africare, NDLEA, NAFDAC, IFAD, etc need to establish information centres in rural communities to provide information on HIV/AIDS prevention, environmental protection, sanitation, drug abuse, educational and employment opportunities, etc. Also, information on fertilizer application, accessibility of agricultural loan, improved farm seeds, market for farm products and sometimes community development could be made accessible in information centres depending on the interest area of the sponsoring body. However, these types of information structures are rarely found in rural communities in Akwa Ibom State.
- **Public Library:** The establishment and operations of public library in any society has bearing with the community wide orientation or extension services. This means, public library has among other functions, the dissemination of information and knowledge to people in rural without bias to sex, age, status, disabilities, religion or educational background. Hence, the library is expected to despatch several mobile vans with varied information resources to rural communities and deliver to the people such resources on loan according to their information needs and on a regular schedule.
- **Private Library:** This type of library is another important structure for information dissemination in rural communities. Some educated people or lovers of books within the communities have their private libraries established in their homes and other people could be allowed access to the available collection based on trust and added to the fact that they need information to either discover or enhance their potentials.

CONCLUSION

There is no gain saying the fact that information remains the bedrock to meaningful development in any setting including rural communities. And the provision of it will lead the rural dwellers to find out about opportunities in education, healthcare, nutrition, housing, transportation, innovations, employment as well as other issues of concern. Therefore, there is need for refocusing on the role of information as change agent. Information managers should recognise the fact that building users loyalty cannot be taken for granted. Building loyalty is all about understanding the various audiences in rural communities and their information demands as well as matching them to the right information. This requires the provision of relevant information using structures like information centres, libraries, resource centres, and the use of other existing structures like village square, town halls, market square, etc. Again, the acquisition of cutting edge skills and competences directly related to the ability of information managers to organise, direct, and control the total activities involved in information circle remain a *sine qua non* to ensuring users' satisfaction and increased patronage. It can thus be concluded that building users' loyalty is the key to effective utilization of information by rural dwellers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Akwa Ibom state government needs to extend its developmental strides to more rural communities especially in areas of electricity, road network, pipe-borne water, housing, etc. The

presence of these basic facilities will definitely attract the establishment of libraries, information centres, and resource centres by the government, NGOs, communities, and even individuals.

- The government should ensure that public libraries function effectively in the area of providing extension services to people in the rural communities.
- Every information structure within the state should be managed by professionals in Library and Information Science
- The Akwa Ibom state government should introduce programmes such as "ICT for Rural Development" in effort to enhance knowledge acquisition in rural communities. The success of such programme(s) will demand monitoring and periodic evaluation in addition to the provision of adequate human, financial and infrastructural resources.

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