

LIBRARY COLLABORATION: ACCESS TO HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN ILAI, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper explored the library collaboration, access to health, environment and agricultural information among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria for sustainable development. Two research objectives were raised; to find out how digital tools impact access to information related to health, environment and agriculture for sustainable development among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria; and identify challenges faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in the utilization of digital tools for accessing information related to health, environment, and agriculture for sustainable development. Phenomenology approach and purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. The population of the study was one hundred and seventy-eight (178). Fifteen (15) women were selected as study participants. Thematic analysis was employed for interview analysis. Findings revealed that non-existence of library and lack of awareness and availability of digital tools hindered utilization of library resources and access to information related to health, environment, and agriculture among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria. Another problem faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in accessing digital health, environment and agricultural information is non- inclusion in government policies. Based on the findings, the study concluded that attainment of sustainable development would only be tenable with unrestricted access to information geared towards appropriate bill on health, economic sustenance and information for agricultural production which is the main occupation of women in Ilai community, Kogi State, Nigeria

Keywords: Access to information, Digital age, Library Collaboration, Rural Women, Sustainable development

Introduction

Collaboration among libraries and access to health, environment, and agricultural information in the digital age are crucial for advancing knowledge, research, and sustainable development. Collaboration refers to the ability and readiness of libraries to share resources to stimulate access to information resources. Effective library collaboration is no longer an option but a necessity (Atkinson, 2019) due to expanding information universe, interdisciplinary research, diverse user needs, technological advancements. Collaboration with libraries for access to health information is of paramount importance for individuals, healthcare professionals, researchers, and society as a whole. Enhancing collaboration among libraries and access to health information are critical for the well-being of rural women and attainment of sustainable development goals. Librarians' involvement in health literacy publications has exponentially increased. The productivity, multidisciplinary collaboration efforts, and consistent growth in literature indicate that librarians are engaged in health literacy scholarship (Wilson, Wombles, Heidel & Grabeel, 2022). Access to information is a necessity for the maintenance of a quality health status.

This study, therefore, explored how access to information enhances the health status of rural women and maintenance of clean environment. Access to information is of paramount importance in various aspects of individual, societal, and global development. Libraries play a major role in improving health literacy among the populace by offering special services (Pirialam, Kazerani, Shekofteh & Razzaghi, 2019). Educating the rural women through creating access to information has effect on the improvement to access and dissemination of health information. Access to information empowers individuals by providing them with knowledge and facts. Informed individuals are better equipped to make decisions about their lives, health, education, and overall well-being. Access to market information, financial services, and business knowledge is essential for economic growth and poverty reduction especially among rural women. Entrepreneurs and businesses can make informed decisions, leading to more sustainable economic development. Timely access to healthcare information can save lives. Individuals can learn about preventive measures, treatment options, and health risks. Healthcare professionals rely on information to diagnose and treat patients effectively. Creating enabling interface to access for information to enhance living a quality life is powered by the information technology of the present digital age. Digital technologies have revolutionized the way information is accessed, shared and utilized across various domains of society. They have play a pivotal role in democratizing access to information, breaking down geographic barriers, and increasing the speed and efficiency of information dissemination. The information age is also called the digital age, thereby emphasizing the rapid introduction of digital technologies, new technical tools, new software and large databases into our lives (Zaborova, 2021). The internet is a global network that has become a primary source for accessing information. Websites, search engines, and online databases provide access to a vast array of knowledge and resources. Digital libraries and repositories, such as Google Books, Project Gutenberg, and institutional repositories offer access to an extensive collection of digitized books, research papers, and historical documents. This has made proximity to information much simplified for making informed decisions for sustainable development.

Access to information is intricately linked to sustainable development in multiple ways. Sustainable development refers to the pursuit of economic, social, and environmental goals in a

way that ensures the well-being of present and future generations. Access to information plays a critical role in achieving sustainability by providing the knowledge, transparency, and empowerment needed to address various challenges. Access to information is critical for empowering the public to make decisions, holding governments' accountable, evaluating public officials in implementing and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals, and facilitating effective public participation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021).. Sustainable Development Goals is enhanced through access to information. It empowers individuals, communities, and governments to make informed decisions. This includes decisions related to resource management, environmental protection, public policy, and social development. Access to information unequivocally possesses the ability to help in environmental conservation. This is a very critical problem in Ilai as deforestation is becoming a serious threat to lives of the people in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Access to information is considered a fundamental right and a catalyst for individual and community development. Libraries play a critical role in providing access to a wide range of information resources, including those related to health, environment, and agriculture. However, there is a growing concern regarding the equitable access to such information, particularly among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria. Rural women represent a significant segment of the global population, contributing substantially to agriculture, healthcare, and environmental sustainability. Yet, they often face unique barriers and challenges in accessing essential information that can improve their livelihoods, well-being, and participation in sustainable development initiatives. This study aimed to shed some light on these challenges and also explore possible solutions.

Research Objectives

The study has the following objectives:

1. To find out how digital tools impact access to information related to health, environment and agriculture for sustainable development among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria.
2. To identify challenges faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in utilization of digital tools for accessing information related to health, environment, and agriculture for sustainable development.

Literature Review

Studies have been conducted which evaluated the impact of collaboration on improving literacy on improving digital literacy skills. For instance, Ojobor, Babarinde & Ezech (2021) examined the assessment of impact of collaboration in improving students' literacy skills in the digital environment. The authors observed that technological changes in the mode of information flow have given rise to what is today known as the digital environment-an environment in which most students encounter great challenges to freely navigate in. The study indicated that nature of information resources that flow in the environment requires some basic skills which are referred to as information literacy skills. The complex process involved in acquiring information literacy skills demands collaboration among students. Collaboration is a learning strategy that allows students to work together with their peers to achieve a common goal. The paper was a literature-based research that highlighted various information literacy skills required of students to adapt to the digital environment; identifies various collaborative platforms to enhance acquisition of such

skills; discusses the relevance of collaboration among students; its challenges and strategies to improve collaborative learning among students.

Similarly, Rachman (2019) observed that library collaboration is an undeniable thing to do, primarily to deal with changes in a very dynamic academic environment. The sought to identify library collaboration in dealing with changes in the academic environment in university libraries in Indonesia which is required to improve competitiveness with the limited resources available. Quantitative approach with descriptive methods was used and the data collection was done by conducting a survey through distribution of questionnaires at 37 University Libraries in Indonesia. Findings showed that that 81% of university libraries in Indonesia have had a collaboration which is carried out with units within one university and units outside the external university and this collaboration can improve the communication, image and roles of libraries to deal with changes in the academic environment and the demands of quality graduates. The most common form of collaboration is with the Information Technology Unit at 26.5%, and with this type of collaboration in providing access to the collection at 25.2%. The existing collaboration, however, has not been evaluated to measure the effectiveness of this collaboration. It established that the awareness of collaboration between university libraries can be an important capital for further mutually beneficial collaboration schemes to deal with changes in the dynamic academic environment.

In another related study, Ogier, Brown, Peter, Hilai & Porter (2018) observed that computationally-intensive, cross-disciplinary research collaborations are difficult to create and maintain over time, though many yield impressive results. The study affirmed the need for researchers to share, maintain, and manage data is increasing, while also integrating new tools and approaches to make their work more impactful. It noted that the University Libraries at Virginia Tech has a team of disciplinary data and informatics consultants working to connect research environments on campus with emerging library services enabling collaboration across disciplines. Partnerships with university-level research service providers, such as high-performance computing (HPC) services and statistical data consulting, have presented interesting use cases and innovative solutions to common problems. While traditional library services may not overlap with high performance computing environments, new library services (such as data management, publishing, curation, archiving, and preservation) provide new avenues for collaboration and situate the libraries in a unique position in relation to research ecosystems. Moving large datasets from HPC environments into research environments present significant barriers to research data sharing between collaborators; working with libraries to make these datasets better organized and documented lowers some of these barriers.

Literature searched by the authors of the paper exposed that no single study focused on the library collaboration, access to health, environment and agricultural information for sustainable development. The studies examined the topics separately and from different perspectives such as collaboration for the advancement of learning powered by advanced technologies. Therefore this study tends to fill in this gap.

Methodology

Phenomenology approach was adopted for this study. This approach provides the avenue for capturing the experiences of individual/s about a phenomenon. This approach was used because it focuses on exploring and understanding the life experiences of individuals. The population of the study was one hundred and seventy-eight (178) women. Selection of sample was through purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling is the most common sampling technique in

phenomenology. Researchers intentionally select participants who have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Fifteen (15) women were selected as study participants. This was reached through data saturation. In other words, data saturation indicates that researchers have collected enough data to thoroughly understand the phenomenon under study, and further data collection is unlikely to yield additional insights or perspectives. The instrument used for data collection was unstructured interview protocol and the interactions with the participants were recorded using handheld device. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

Result and Discussion

Altogether, a total of 30 narratives capturing the life experiences of rural women in Ilai regarding library collaborations and access to information for coping with everyday information geared towards sustainable development were generated through the two research objectives. There were 15 narratives for each research objectives for this study as follows.

Impact of Digital tools on access to information related to health, environment and agriculture for sustainable development among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria

This research objective sought to find out the impact of digital tools on access to information related to health, environment and agriculture among rural women in Ilai Kogi State, Nigeria. Two themes emerged through the data analysis for this objective; non-existence of library and lack of awareness about digital tools. These themes are discussed as follows:

a. Theme One Non-existence of Library: This theme consists of the narratives of the participants about the non-existence of a library in the setting where this study was conducted. The researchers found out through the participants that there is no library in the community. It was made known to the researcher that the participants just hear about the concept of library and different digital tools that could be used for accessing information resources on various life improving sector but have never been opportune to use any of the digital tools to access any information resources nor any library. Some narratives of the participants who partook in this study are reflected as follows in their words;

“You ask about library resources and digital tools? Are they the same with books? As you can see, there is no library in this village” (P 1, 2 & 3).

“You asked me about the use of library resources? What are these resources? I ask you this question because I have never been to any library and neither do I have idea about any digital tools. The only digital thing I know as far as I am concerned is my phone. And you can see that it is not even close in comparison to the type you are holding” (P5).

“There is no library here in our community and in all the neighbouring towns. I have never used any library resources whenever I need information. We (women in this community) rely on each other for accessing information about our health and for other crucial information” (P12).

“As you can see, there is no library here. The only thing I knew is that I informed by my grandfather during his life time that there was a building referred to as Reading Room in this community during the Colonial Era. But that building has collapsed a long time ago. Is the reading room the same with the library resources” (P15)

b. Theme Two- Lack of awareness about digital tools: This theme captured the worldview of the participants who expressed that they do not even know what digital tools means. It became evident that the participants in this study setting have no knowledge about the tools. It showed that they are naive about the digital tools that can and should enhance access to information in this digital age. The participants’ narratives about this theme are presented as follows;

“I am not aware of anything referred to as digital tools. From your explanation, you made us realize that it can be used on a computer. I do not have computer neither have I touched one before. I get to see this sort of things when people come home during Christmas celebration. It is my dream to have one myself” (P4).

“I have no idea about what you ask me. There has been no power supply in this village in the past three years after a heavy rainstorm. How can I have an idea of such thing when we lack the basic amenities in this part of the State? To even charge the phone I am using, I rely on my neighbours when they put on the generators. And with the price of fuel now, it becomes more difficult to do that” (P8).

“I do not know what digitals look like. Is it something that can be held in the hand” (P10&13).

Challenges faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in the utilization of digital tools for accessing information related to health, environment, and agriculture for sustainable development

This research objective determined the challenges faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in accessing digital health, environment, and agricultural information through the use of library resources. Only one theme emerged through the data analysis for this objective; non- inclusion in government policies.

Theme One- Non-Inclusion in government policies: This theme consists of the narratives of the women studied about how non-inclusion of the village in government policies has been a great bottleneck to accessing information. This theme has two sub-themes; lack of evidence of governance and economic status.

a. Lack of evidence of governance: This sub-theme consists of the narratives of the women about the impact of lack of evidence of governance towards accessing information for health, economic and agriculture for the attainment of sustainable development. The researchers deduced through the narratives that lack of evidence of governance is evident in terms of power supply, accessible road, non- availability of library among others. Narratives about this sub-theme are as follows;

“This community has nothing to show that the town is under any form of governance. The road leading to this village is not good. Getting transportation to convey our farm produce is always a problem; and when we get, it is always at exorbitant rate” (P2).

“There is no power supply; so even if the digitals you asked me are available, how will it be powered and used for accessing information needs?. No power supply and nothing is done about it both at the Local Government and State Government levels” (P8).

b. Economic Status: This sub-theme consists of the narratives of the women in this study setting about the impact of lack of evidence of governance towards accessing information for health, economic and agriculture for the attainment of sustainable development. The researchers realized through the narratives of the participants in this study that the economic status of the women hinders them from having access to information. Narratives about this sub-theme are as follows;

“I am not employed and lack the financial power to be able to afford these digital skills. Based on this interview with me, I have come to understand the importance of library resources and access to information. But I am not in a position to make them available for use based on my economic status” (P12).

“Everyday life survival is dependent on my pocket. I do not have the money to get all the things that will make me get information without problems (P13)”.

Discussion

This section consists of the discussion of findings in line with the research objectives of the study which is presented below.

Impact of Digital tools on access to information related health, environment and agriculture among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria

The findings of the study revealed that utilization of digital tools for accessing information related to health, environment, and agriculture among rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria is determined by the lack of awareness and knowledge about digital tools and non-existence of library. Utilization of library resources for sustainable development is essential for promoting knowledge, awareness and action towards sustainable practices and goals. Libraries play crucial roles in disseminating information, supporting research, and educating communities about sustainability. Women in this study setting lack access to library resources, without which access to information is not guaranteed. It is a norm that libraries provide access to a wide range of books, journals, reports, and research articles related to sustainable development. Users can explore topics such as climate change, biodiversity conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture. This is denied to the women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria.

Utilization and access to information are of paramount importance for sustainable development. Unrestricted access to information is necessary for promoting economic growth, social equity, environmental conservation, and overall well-being of individuals and communities, especially women in rural communities. Access to information is a fundamental enabler of sustainable development. It promotes informed choices, equitable opportunities, and responsible practices; ultimately contributing to a more prosperous, equitable, and environmentally sound future for all. Efforts to enhance access to information, especially in underserved communities should be a priority in sustainable development agendas worldwide.

Studies (Internet Society, 2020; Rotondi, Pesando, Sinelli & Billari, 2020) reported that boosting mobile-phone access and coverage and closing digital divides, particularly among women, can be powerful tools to attain empowerment-related sustainable development goals, in an ultimate effort to enhance population health and well-being and reduce poverty. Similarly, access to the Internet is fundamental to achieving this vision for the future. It can improve the quality of education in many ways. It opens doorways to a wealth of information, knowledge and educational resources, increasing opportunities for learning in and beyond the classroom (Internet Society, 2027).

Awareness of the library resources and digital tools among the women in Ilai serves as the gateway to the use of these resources and technologies. State of awareness determines to either use or reject. Awareness of the access and use of digital tools is crucial in today's increasingly digital world. This awareness has far-reaching implications for individuals, communities, businesses, and society as a whole. Awareness of information and digital tools enables digital inclusion. Awareness ensures that individuals are aware of and have access to digital tools and technologies. It promotes digital inclusion, reducing the digital divide and ensuring that no one is left behind in the digital age.

Studies (Alordiah, Osagiede, Omumu, Okokoyo, Emiko- Agbakor Oji, 2023) have affirmed the role of awareness, means of accessing information and digital tools for sustainable development among people in rural areas. In essence, there is low level of awareness, knowledge, and utilization of online digital tools. It is evident that understanding digital tools and technologies is essential for career development. Awareness of digital tools opens up a wide range of job opportunities and enhances employability in various industries.

This implication of this finding is that access to library resources and digital tools is all encompassing to enable and empower individuals' especially rural women in making informed decision for sustenance of better life.

Challenges faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in the utilization of digital tools for accessing information related to health, environment, and agriculture for sustainable development

The findings revealed that the only challenge faced by rural women in Ilai, Kogi State, Nigeria in accessing digital health, environment and agricultural information is non- inclusion in government policies. It is the backbone of the digital age, enabling people to perform a wide range of tasks efficiently and effectively in both personal and professional contexts. Non-inclusion in government policies, also known as policy exclusion or policy neglect, can have significant consequences for individuals, communities, and society at large. Non-inclusion often affects the lives of women in Ilai community, Kogi State Nigeria; this is because they lack access to basic necessity required for living a quality life – access to information. When policies fail to address their specific needs, these women face discrimination, unequal access to resources, and social exclusion. The women cannot operate on the same paradigm with their contemporaries in the urban centres mainly due to lack of access to information for informed decision making.

Non-inclusion in government policy often involves advocating for more inclusive and equitable policy making processes, conducting research to identify gaps and disparities, engaging the affected communities, and promoting diversity and representation in government decision-making bodies. Inclusive policies can contribute to a more just and equitable society where the needs and rights of all citizens are recognized and addressed.

Lack of effective governance can have significant and adverse effects on the lives of rural women. Rural women often face unique challenges and vulnerabilities, and the absence or inadequacy of governance exacerbates these difficulties. Rural women often engage in agriculture and small-scale businesses. Ineffective governance may lead to inadequate infrastructure, lack of access to credit, and unfair land rights, limiting their economic opportunities and financial independence.

Studies have affirmed the importance of access to information for sustainable development. For instance, Mabuie (2023) stated that a strong relationship between public access to information and accomplishment of the SDGs. When the public is informed, they can get involved in the developmental course, evaluate the progress and keep their leaders responsible. Thus, access to information is crucial to the attainment of individual goals and objectives as well as for achieving sustainable development.

Conclusion

It is concluded based on the findings of this study that attainment of sustainable development would be greatly tenable through creating unrestricted access to information on health, environment and agriculture; this will ensure a sustainable development for the attainment of a clean bill of health, economic sustenance and information essential for agricultural production which is the main occupation of the women in Ilai community, Kogi State, Nigeria. Digital tools play a transformative role in the sustainable development of rural women by enhancing their economic, educational, health, social, and political capabilities. By bridging the digital divide, these tools help rural women overcome barriers, achieve greater autonomy, and contribute more effectively to their communities' sustainable development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Both the State and Local Government authorities should have a clear policy for the development of digital libraries in all segments of the State. The State Library Board should be well funded in order to be able to provide effective and efficient library services. The State Library Board should establish mobile libraries that can reach out to the rural communities and equally create awareness about the essential tools in this digital age.
2. The State Government should ensure the inclusion of all towns and communities in all government policies. This should cut across all ministries and parastatals in the State for improved living standard and economic status of people in the rural communities

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