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LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY FOR PREVENTION OF COVID-19 IN RURAL AREA

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Abstract

Majority of Nigerian's live in the rural areas, they serve the base for the production of food, a major source of capital manufactures, given the contribution of the rural sector to the national economy its health need must be given priorities, so their economy and institutions should not be in a state of stagnation at this era of COVID-19 pandemic. The paper is to highlight the role of the libraries as a social agency for the fight against the spread of COVID-19 virus. It conclude the timely and well packaged COVID-19 information and make it accessible to the people will sustain the control and prevention of the virus, among others, Establishment of public libraries in the rural communities should be considered as an urgent need of the state.
Keywords: Libraries, information, COVID-19, Rural communities.

Introduction

The term 'rural' is an adjective that precedes a noun, such as a place, person, society, community', area, dweller, economy, environment etc. so we have the rural area, rural society, rural economy, rural environment etc. Strictly, compared to the antonym urban; rural and urban are the two categorization of the society (Barth-Nengia & Edeh, 2018). A rural area according to Olatunbosun (1975) in Omale (2005) is an area with a population lower than 20,000 occupationally, specific location, removed from an urban area in terms of services like water, health, electricity, etc. (and as far as Nigeria is concerned poorly provided for by the index of demography, Nigeria is 80% rural).

The American Bureau of Census classified a group of people living in a community having a population of not more than 2,500 people as rural. Whereas in Nigeria, the Federal Office of Statistics defines a community less than 20,000. People as rural. According to Afolaya (1975) rural areas can be easily identified by various criteria apart from the population.

Such critical includes the level of infrastructural development, road networks, educational institutions, health, water, environment, etc. Anele (2012) hypothetically said life in rural areas is hard rustic and sometimes inhuman cannot be overemphasized. Many rural dwellers are traumatized by poverty, starvation and diseases. Muoghalu (1992) observed that rural areas are characterized by depressingly meagre annual per capita income, pervasive and endemic poverty, manifested by widespread hunger, malnutrition, poor health, general lack of access to formal education, lack of livable housing and various forms of social and political isolation compared with their urban counterparts.

The Asian Development Bank (2007) observed that rural societies live in a simple environment, yet structure and the dynamics of their day to day life are complex, poverty and underdevelopment are synonymous with the rural setting of the developing countries of the world, with Nigeria inclusive. Abah (2000) perceived that the deplorable condition of the Nigerian rural sector is emphatic. The rural population constitutes the Nigerian peasantry, the poor and the target illiterates groups. The rural poor are the heterogeneous group which includes small- scale famers, the landless, nomads. Pastoralists and fishermen, they share common disabilities, limited assets, poverty, malnutrition, environmental vulnerability and lack of access to public services, poor medical facilities, the persistence of local endemic disease, sometime without cure which reduces the quality of labour force, premature death, a dependent deprived womenfolk, unproductive, subsistence agriculture, etc.

Ekekepe and Ekpe (2009) averred that whether you are in the northern part of the southern part of Nigeria, you will be stuck by the level of abject poverty, mass illiteracy, unsanitized environment, lack of clean water, lack of access road, unavailability of health care facilities, improper and inadequate housing large family sizes, small income, defeatist/fatali attitude, out of mode ineffective farming implement. It is a fact that the inhabitants of the rural areas are experiencing various challenges associated with health status and well-being. These health challenges range from preventable diseases to other sophisticated health problems, which are mainly attributed to the environmental conditions and poor living condition of the people.

COVID-19: Control and Prevention

In late 2019, a novel coronavirus, now designated SARS-CoV-2, was identified as the cause of an outbreak of acute respiratory illness in Wuhan, a city in the Hubei province of China. In February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated the disease COVID-19, which stands for coronavirus disease in 2019. The clinical presentation of2019-nCoV infection ranges from asymptomatic to very severe pneumonia with acute respiratory distress syndrome, septic shock and multi-organ failure, which may result in death (New England, 2020). On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern and, in March 2020, began to characterize it as a pandemic to emphasize the gravity of the situation and urge all countries to take action in detecting infection and preventing spread.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to spread mainly from person to person, mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs. Other routes have also been implicated in the transmission of coronaviruses, such 25 contact with contaminated fomites and inhalation of aerosols, produced during aerosol-generating procedures. Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from asymptomatic individuals (or individuals within the incubation period) has also been described. However, the extent to which this occurs remains unknown (Wei, et al. 2020).

Unfortunately, no medication has been approved by the FDA, gone through controlled studies and demonstrated an effect on the virus for this global pandemic. Although there are cures for illnesses and developments made by leaps and bounds in our day, the strongest and most effective weapon that society has against this virus that is affecting not just health but also economies, politics, and social order, is the prevention of its spread. The interim guidance published by the WHO on 7 March 2020, “Responding to community spread of COVID-19,” states that preventing COVID- 19 from spreading is through the development of coordination mechanisms not just in health but in areas such as transportation, travel, commerce, finance, security and other sectors which encompasses the entirety of society (WHO. 2020).

Preventive measures are the current strategy to limit the spread of cases. Early screening, diagnosis, isolation, and treatment are necessary to prevent further spread. Preventive strategies are focused on the isolation of patients and careful infection control, including appropriate

measures to be adopted during the diagnosis and the provision of clinical care to an infected patient.

The most important strategy for the population to undertake is to frequently wash their hands and use portable hand sanitiser and avoid contact with their face and mouth after interacting with a possibly contaminated environment. To reduce the risk of transmission in the community, individuals should be advised to wash hands diligently, practice respiratory hygiene (ie. Cover their cough), and avoid crowds and close contact with ill individuals, if possible. There are posters and brochures prepared by many organizations on all issues related to protection from COVID-19 and are widely used all over the world.

The WHO and other similar health organizations have published visual tools such as videos and posters to demonstrate the correct application of hand hygiene throughout the entire society. These posters, distributed throughout different parts of society to draw maximum attention to the importance of hand hygiene, created awareness among all of them. With the increase in the number of people carrying hand sanitiser with them for the application of instant hand hygiene and the spread of mask usage among people in countries such as China, Korea, and Japan, the pandemic was brought under control much more quickly. In those countries where such measures were not made mandatory, the exponential rise in the number of cases continues.

Social distancing is advised, particularly in locations that have community transmission. Many countries have installed quarantine and social physical distancing as measures to prevent the further spread of the virus. These measures can include:

- The full or partial closure of educational institutions and workplaces;
- Limiting the number of visitors and limiting the contact between the residents of confined settings, such as long-term care facilities and prisons,
- Cancellation, prohibition and restriction of mass gatherings and smaller meetings.
- Mandatory quarantine of buildings or residential areas;
- Internal or external border closures; and
- Stay-at-home restrictions for entire regions or countries,

Protect yourself and others from COVID- 19

You can reduce your chances of being infected or spreading COVID-19 by taking some simple precautions:

- Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water. Why? Washing your hands with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub kills viruses that may be on your hands.
- Maintain at least 1 metre (3 feet) distance between yourself and others. Why? When someone coughs, sneezes, or speaks they spray small liquid droplets from their nose or mouth which may contain a virus. If you are too close, you can breathe in the droplets, including the COVID-19 virus if the person has the disease.
- Avoid going to crowded places. Why? Where people come together in crowds, you are more likely to come into close contact with someone that has COVID-19 and it is more difficult to maintain a physical distance of I meter.
- Governments should encourage the general public to wear a fabric mask if there is widespread community transmission, and especially where physical distancing cannot be maintained. Why? Masks are a key tool in a comprehensive approach to the fight against COVID-19.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth. Why? Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth from there, the virus can enter your body and infect you.
- Make sure you and the people around you, follow good respiratory hygiene. This means covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately and wash your hands. Why? Droplets spread the virus. By following good respiratory hygiene, you protect the people around you from viruses such as cold, flu and COVID-19.
- Stay home and self-isolate even with minor symptoms such as cough, headache, mild fever, until you recover. Have someone bring you supplies. If you need to leave your house, wear a mask to avoid infecting others. Why? Avoiding contact with others will protect them from possible COVID-19 and other viruses.
- If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention, but call by telephone in advance if possible and follow the directions of your local health authority. Why? National and local authorities will have the most up to date information on the

situation in your area. Calling in advance will allow your health care provider to quickly direct you to the right health facility. This will also protect you and help prevent the spread of viruses and other infections.

- Keep up to date on the latest information from trusted sources. Such as WHO or your local and national health authorities. Why? Local and national authorities are best placed to advise on what people in your area should be doing to protect themselves.

Safe use of alcohol-based hand sanitisers

To protect yourself and others against COVID-19, clean your hands frequently and thoroughly. Use alcohol-based hand sanitiser wash your hands with soap and water. If see you alcohol-based hand sanitiser make sure you use and store it carefully.

Libraries and Information Accessibility

There is one social disease that stands in the way of success to the control and prevention of COVID-19 in Nigeria society. This disease is ignorance, information is the only antidote to ignorance, and the library is the institution designed through its functions of adequately dispenses this antidote and disperse ignorance.

The Library Glossary (1987) see a library as a place where information is acquired, stored, processed, organized, retrieved and disseminated to potential users when the need arises. To Ugwuogu (2006), the library is a social instrument designed to serve information, recreation, research, culture, education and conservation. It is a veritable tool or repository of knowledge that provides the vital underpinnings for socio-economic. Political and cultural development in any civilization. Libraries contain written. Printed, information technologies and other materials like periodicals, films, audio tapes, microforms and other information bearing materials.

All the above materials are used by the library to disseminate information to users for knowledge and decision making. The recognition of information as power, strength, weapon and the fourth factor even in the line of production, in addition to land, labour, and capital, re-echo its importance in the present world order.

The bedrock for all kinds of development in varying societies is information (Ezeani. 2013) information is that which one has that is useful for decision making. It illuminates and removes fears and doubt, anxiety, and ignorance. Though timeless, information need forms the gap between what one knows and what one ought to know.

Access to information by the rural dwellers in Nigeria therefore, a right and not a privilege. It is critical in the people's understanding of their entitlement to welfare benefits and sources of support to overcome social exclusion (Harande, 2009). Okiy (2013), notes that rural development is a basis for economic development and information is an important ingredient for people's participation. It is through the provision of information on matters affecting communities and the people's access to information that produces the desired development. Tackie and Adams (2007) agrees to this noting that adequate and up-to- date information is clearly of paramount importance to organizations and communities to attain target goals.

Harande (2009) cited in Alegbeleye and Ama (1985) includes Health information, Sustainable wealth creation, Agriculture and allied occupations, Education, Welfare and family matters, Crime and Safety etc. as some of the information needs. Although other aspects of information are crucial to the rural areas, in no time do they require timely information on health than now on deadly diseases ravaging the world. Such diseases as cholera, polio, meningitis, AIDS, malaria etc. Are recognized by the World Health Organization as slow killers that needs greater awareness and mode of tackling it. Even as much fund has been spent by donor agencies; the rural areas still stands at great risk of suffering from these ailments based on limited and sometimes lack of information and action. Today, the issue of the dreaded scourge Ebola is on the news again ravaging most of Central Africa and by extension the world.

Health is such an abstract concept which poses difficult to be ascribed a definition due to varied perception on it. However, the World Health Organization sees it as a state of complete physical, mental and social well- being. It includes such other aspects as physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual. Health information therefore, the knowledge, feeling and behaviour to be applied to existing or envisaged health problem. Uzoagba and Nwokedi (2013) attribute it to the knowledge that informs. Motivates and help people to adopt and maintain a healthy practice and life style among others, it informs people about existence mode of infection and prevention of diseases to promote good health.

Health information is related to those pieces of information that will make the user have physical and emotional stability. It contains such information as sanitation rules and regulations (environmental cleanliness). Family planning, diseases control and prevention, immunization, location of good hospitals and clinics, laboratory centres, and the like. It may also include news about international bodies and agencies responsible for global health activities as the World Health Organization (Uhegbu, 2007). Dissemination of health information to the people in a

community by the library is akin to the adage which says "to be forewarned to be forearmed". Health information will among other things, enable people to understand that certain diseases like cholera as a result of poor hygienic environment, that nutritional disorder like kwashiorkor is reduced by fat, the incidence of maternal and mortality, why family planning rather than encourage promiscuity among women as is erroneously believed by some rural folks, helps to reduce the dangers arising from multiple and unwanted pregnancies, as well as ensure that families stop at the masher of children they can comfortably care for, and even enable them to choose the sex of their babies. Health information is timely and needs to be handled as a matter of urgent importance. It leads to the decimation of populations if neglected, especially in case of high infection mobility.

The need therefore, a concerted effort by special information handle agencies required, with much support from international donor agencies to raise awareness on health matters. This is where the library comes in. The information needs for rural communities in Nigeria are provided in forms of library extension services. The libraries offer support services needed by different organizations, agencies and groups such as schools, churches, health organizations, age- grades, social mobilizations centre, etc. they provide space for organizing educational and enlightenment campaigns and programmes needed by the rural communities to stimulate and promote activities. Adimorah (1989) asserts that library extension services may take the form of space provision as avenues for organizing talks, seminars, workshops, lectures and recreational activities, and that users take the opportunity to acquire greater knowledge, skills and experiences. The libraries provide the information needs of the rural communities in the form of its mobile library service. Uwa (2014) posits that mobile library service provides information to the doorsteps of the prospective usern remotely located, making dramatic impacts on the rural communities. Nwalo (2003) and Ranganthan (1992) describe mobile libraries as "library in miniature", "knowledge on the wheel", and "librachine", mobile library provide information at service stations, such as village squares, town halls, courts, health centre etc, for the benefit of the rural communities.

Apart from the traditional functions of selection, acquisition, organization, storage and retrieval of information to satisfy the information needs of the communities. Other methods that the libraries could use to make health information accessible to the people to support the prevention of COVID-19 in Nigeria's rural communities are stated below.

Displays and Exhibitions: To display is to put something in a place where people can see it easily. To exhibit means to show something in a public place for people to enjoy and giving them information. Library displays are usually done within the library premises especially around the readers department. An organized display of information materials such as films, videos, books, magazines, tapes etc on health issues will attract the attention of library users to their existence, and some may even be borrowed by clientele for home reading. The library can as well organize an exhibition of health information materials in the community. Public places like town halls, village squares health centre, etc. can be used as venues. This type of exhibition is usually done in collaboration with authors, health workers and book vendors. Leaflets and handbills can be freely distributed and thus, great awareness is generated.

Public Enlightenment Awareness: The library can collaborate with the State Ministry of Health or Directorate of Public Health and mount an awareness enlightenment campaign in the community to eradicate and enlighten the people on prevailing health issues, especially those that are common in the community. Audio visuals like films, video, posters, etc. concerning the health problem can be shown to the audience to make them have a vicarious experience of the subject matter. A medical doctor or a competent health worker can be brought in to deliver talks and give some explanations during the campaign.

Well designed and colourful posters with catchy messages written in both English and local languages are a very good vehicle for public enlightenment and awareness campaign.

Use of Oral Media: This is the use of traditional associations and institutions like the town criers, age grades, cultural groups, market associations, traditional rulers and religious organizations to disseminate information to the people in the community. Public owned associations or groups as mentioned above command the attention and loyalty of their members and therefore are good media for information dissemination especially in rural communities.
Information Packing: This refers to the ways of adopting information to suit the desired information need of any user (Uhegbu, 2007). Information users in any community differ in their academic backgrounds and qualifications, cultural and religious beliefs, occupational and professional inclinations as well as their psychological and socio-economic backgrounds. These differences affect their perception and understanding of the information at their different background. In information packing, the librarian rearranges or repackages the contents of the information in such a way that it would satisfy the information need of the user, given his or

her background. Packaging and repackaging of information can be done in the following ways: Content Repacking. Medium Repackaging. Language Repackaging and Time Schedule.

Conclusion

Relevant Health information is necessary for ensuring proper health practices. Okore and Njoku (2012) advocate for information repackaging in the local language of its environment and develop rural information centers and information systems, Pyti, (2009) citing National Knowledge Commission of India posits that libraries as information disseminators have a social function in making knowledge available to all.

It is through this role that various health issues can be communicated to the rural communities. He further stated that the libraries serve as local centers of information and learning and are gateways to national and global knowledge. Libraries must create avenues to reach out and mobilize communities with information that will help in controlling the scourge of deplorable health in Nigeria. This calls for all hands to be on deck, to introduce programmes to improve the delivery of basic health care services to the rural communities.

Community mobilization is therefore, all activities carried out in building capacity for citizens to identify their needs, interest, resources and remedies, in a way that will enhance representative participation, good health, accountability, astute governance and create peaceful change. The government in its desire to ensure good health and welfare of its citizens, established agencies and organizations charged with the responsibility of information dissemination, whose responsibilities includes social mobilization and information delivery. Oyeniyi and Olaifa (2011) identified libraries as an important agent for information dissemination, so libraries should be in the forefront of carrying out these exercises.

Recommendation

In view of the above, this paper recommended the following:

- The government should ensure that health facilities and medical centres are provided and well equipped in the rural communities.
- The use of indigenous languages for health information especially on COVID-19 dissemination in the rural communities.
- The need to repackage health information both in content and strategies of delivery.
- Acquisition of health information materials and audio visuals among others for the dissemination of the same to the communities.

- Collaboration between libraries, health institutions and agencies, including relevant Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the successful implementation of COVID-19 protocols in Nigeria's rural communities.
- Lastly and very important, the establishment of libraries and information centres in very communities in Nigeria.

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