

INFORMATION NEEDS AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOURS OF MEMBERS OF THE IMO STATE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY (IHA) OWERRI

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the information needs and information seeking behaviours of members of the Imo State House of Assembly. (IHA) Owerri. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire using the survey method. A total of 27 questionnaires were distributed out of which 23 representing 85.2% were responded to and returned. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data using frequency counts and simple percentages. The findings revealed that the legislators need information that will enhance the quick passage of bills, which will improve the lives, and security of citizens in the state, while their sources of information include newspapers, magazines, and local radio and television programmes. It was however found that the legislators do not use the House of Assembly library because of the inadequate services it provided. The paper concludes that the House of Assembly library should be improved to provide the type of information resources and services that will facilitate the Law making functions of the legislators.

INTRODUCTION

The third republic commenced in 1999 following the general election held in Nigeria and the subsequent hand over of government to the civilians. This brought an end to the long rule by the military government in Nigeria. The 1999 general election produced the civilian president, the 36 state governors, members of the national Assembly as well as members of the state Assemblies. The Chairmen and Councillors of the various local governments in Nigeria were also elected during the 1999 general election. In Imo State. 27 legislators were elected into the State House of Assembly.

The successful completion of this tenure in 2003 was quickly followed with another general election. The 2003 general election produced twenty-seven (27) members for Imo State House of Assembly who were elected from the 27 State Constituencies in the state. The legislators like other people in other arms of government need information for functional, effective and efficient performance of their statutory functions. Suffice it to say that legislators cannot function effectively and enact laws for the good governance of the state if they are not properly informed on the state of things in their various constituencies. This could be the reason why the Imo State House of Assembly was established in 1979 to provide information support services to the legislators.

To the Legislators, information is a vital tool which enhances the enactment of good laws for the welfare of the citizens, the development of the state and sustenance of democracy in Nigeria. The legislators by all means need information for the performance of their duties. This paper tends to study the information needs and information seeking behaviours of members of Imo State House of Assembly. Owerri.

Research Questions.

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study,

1. Which types of information do members of Imo State House of Assembly require?
2. How do members of IHA obtain the information they use?
3. What are the sources of the types of information used by members of IHA?
4. What factors account for their information needs?
5. What problems do the legislators encounter in obtaining the information they need?

Review of Related Literature.

The term "information" means different things to different people. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002) defined information as the message of human experience. That is. what is transmitted, a signal or a stimulus. Kaniki (1992) also defined information as ideas, facts, imaginative works of mind and data of value potentially useful in decision-making, questions and answers, problem solving etc.

Similarly, Otolu (2006) defined information as an organized data recorded in various forms that is, ideas, skills, facts, feelings, impressions or experiences While Uwem's study (as cited by Gbadamosi. 2005) stated that information is data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering a users query, be it recorded, summarized or simply collected that would help in decision-making.

Information is an indispensable tool for decision-making. This could be the reason why Okwilagwe (1993) and Opeke (1993) in their different studies averred that information is a requisite for effective decision-making; Turner (1988) also stated that information is the key resource in our society. It is a resource which allows economic growth and greater social equalities.

The importance of information cannot be over emphasized here since according to Nzotta (1990), appropriate information is needed for decision making that will be fair to all parties concerned no matter for what purpose it was meant or used concerning the information needs of workers. Besides. Aboyade (1984] posited that information is the basis for the progress of human civilization and society. More so. Daniel (1987) stated that information is the vehicle and substance that deals with reality. He went further to say that it is a resource for acquisition of power.

The uses of information varies among individuals, groups and societies. This differences in information needs and uses was rightly captured by Adewunmi (2003) when he stated that information needs vary with users, time, purpose, location, alternatives available and so on. Gbadamosi (2005) corroborated this when he stated that educational administrators and medical doctors rely on information to perform their functions. Adewunmi (2003) also reported that agricultural scientists need information on current discoveries in agricultural and farm technology, farm problem, farmers information communicative patterns, how to access where to get information materials for research.

Similarly. Bali's study (as cited by Esin and Ani, 2002) stated that the navy need information related to the defence of the nation's territorial waters.

Chifwepa (1993) recorded that researchers need information to further their knowledge or subject interest and to know what has already been done in order to avoid duplication of efforts and results.

Furthermore. Edem (1993) stated that journalists require information on government affairs and political activities; while Williamson (1990) asserted that qualified nurses in Bloomberg health authority require information on medical/ surgical clinic, nurses care, drug therapy, supplies and equipments.

It is believed that the state legislators will need information that will enhance their legislative functions which will enhance peoples welfare, security and economic, social, political, educational and cultural development. Based on the varying need of information as well as

different sources or carriers of information replete in libraries, information centers or media, different professionals, groups and individuals seek for information that will satisfy their information needs in different sources.

Adimorah (1993) stated that information sources like newspapers and directories are mostly needed in the industrial sectors. Osiobe (1986) reported that physicians and medical students prefer the use of journals for their information needs. Odusanya and Amusa (2003) revealed that science lecturers at Olabisi Onabanjo University Ago-Iwoye made extensive use of indexes, abstracts, subject bibliographies and current awareness package (CAP) as sources of their information needs.

Current and factual information according to Golberg (1991) could be obtained listening to television news, radio programmes, books, reports, periodicals and newspapers. Bozimo (1983) also stated that journals, textbooks, theses and dissertations, monographs, treatises and government documents are sources of information to academics.

Information needs, seeking behaviours and utilization by people have their peculiar problems. Such problems could be created by the information seekers and users or from extraneous factors that could delay the free flow of information.

Hounsell (1979) in his study revealed that some teachers lack knowledge about the existence of information sources, which makes it difficult to articulate their information needs. Adimorah (1993) also posited that age, educational background, nature of work and rank are factors that affect information needs, seeking, and utilization by people.

In the views of Shehu, Yakubu and Ameh (2001), time factor affects the use of library and journals by registrars and surgeons. Awokoya (1988) equally reported that the problems of information seekers included:

Inadequate information centers, inadequate qualified staff and libraries, incompetent library staff, parental responsibilities, economic squeeze, lack of relevant information materials, lack of knowledge of how to obtain information needed, distance from library and unconducive operational house as well as lack of information technologies like telephone and photocopiers.

Adimorah (1993) summed it up in his study when he stated *that the factors* affecting the information needs of scientists and technologists include:

- non-availability of current journals in their various fields:
- lack of literature search facilities such as database on science and technology:
- lack of adequate inter-library loan facilities:
- poor information storage and retrieval systems:
- inadequate source of information on Nigerian science and technology; and
- library and information centre not oriented towards offering responsive information services to research staff.
- Akinbode (1998) sees the cost of journals in Nigeria as a serious problem militating against information needs and utilization behaviours of people. From the literature reviewed, it is very clear that information is indispensable in every facet of human endeavour not minding the difficulties encountered while trying to obtain it.

Research methodology

The research method used in this study was the survey method using questionnaire as instrument for data collection. A total of 27 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to all the 27 legislators at the Imo state House of Assembly. Out of this number, only 23 copies of the questionnaire representing 85.2% were duly responded to and returned to the researcher.

Findings and Discussion

The researcher sought to know from the respondents whether members of Imo State House of Assembly needed information. Their responses showed that all the 23 respondents representing 100% indicated that they need information for their daily activities. The respondents were also requested to indicate the types of information they need. Their responses are shown in Table.

Table 1; Types of information needed.

Types of Information needed	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Information on the distribution of fertilizer	6	26
Information on the distribution of health care facilities and drugs	23	100
Information on the building and renovation of schools	23	100
Information on the distribution of social amenities (wafer electricity)	19	83
Information on the construction and renovation of roads.	19	83
Information on the employment of public servants.	23	100
Information on political appointments.	23	100
Information on the granting of autonomous communities and appointment of traditional rulers.	13	57
Information on security	21	91
Information on political meetings and campaigns	18	78
Information on the creation of political wards	13	57
Information on the award of government contracts	13	57
Information on sports	17	74

Table 1 shows that all the respondents 23(100%) indicated that they needed information on the distribution of healthcare facilities and drugs, building and renovation of schools, employment of public servants and political appoints, it can also be observed from Table 1 that only 6(26%) of the respondents indicated that they needed information on the distribution of fertilizers to farmers in the state. Similarly, 13(57%) of the respondents indicated that they needed information on the creation of autonomous communities and appointment of traditional rulers, creation of political wards and award of government contracts in the state. It can be observed from Table I that only 17(74%) respondents agreed that they needed information on sports development in the state.

Again, the respondents were requested to state the reasons why they need such information. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for information need.

Responses	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
To update my knowledge in the state of affairs in the State	23	100
To enable me make meaningful contribution in the House debate	23	100
To prepare for political rallies	4	17.4
To know the state of the economy in the country	23	100
To be acquainted with the countries foreign policy.	18	78.3

It can be observed that 23(100%) indicated that they needed information to update their knowledge on what is happening in the state; to enable them contribute meaningfully to the debate in the House as well as to know the state of the economy in the country at large. Only 4 (17.4%) respondents indicated that they needed information to prepare for political rallies. Again, the researcher also requested the respondents to indicate the types of information materials usually consulted for their information needs. Their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sources of information consulted

Sources of information	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Professional/subject textbooks	4	17.4
Professional Journals	4	17.4
Newspapers/Magazines	23	100
Reference books	2	8.7
Government gazetteers	12	52
Fiction (Novels)	0	0
Company Reports	7	30
Circulars	18	78
Government newsletters / bulletins	18	78
Radio	23	100
Television	23	100
Cable network	12	52
Internet	16	70
GSM/SMS	3	13

Table 3 shows that 3(13%) of the respondents indicated that they receive information through the Global System of Mobile communication (GSM) short Message Services (SMS). 23 (100%) respondents indicated that their sources of information are the newspapers, magazines, the local radio and television programmes. Table 3 also shows that 2(8.7%) indicated that they obtain information from reference materials. On the contrary. 0% of the respondent indicated that he reads fiction (Novels). The above results show that the legislators saw Newspapers/magazines, the local radio and television programmes as a major carriers of the type of information they needed.

The respondents were also requested to state where they usually obtain the type of information resources they use. Their responses are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Types of libraries and information centres

Options	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
National Library	0	0
Public Library	0	0
Special Library	2	8.7
School Library	0	0
Academic Library	0	0
The Archive	0	0
State Ministry of Information and Culture	7	30.4
Fed. Min. of Information	0	0
State Orientation agency	4	17.4

Table 4, shows that only 2(8.7%) of the respondents indicated that they obtain the types of information materials they use from the special Library (House of Assembly Library). 7(30.4%) also agreed that they obtain their information materials from the State ministry of information and culture. While 4(17.4%) of the respondents stated that they obtain their information from the state orientation agency. It could also be observed from Table 4 that none of the respondents agreed that he obtains information resources from the National, public, school and academic libraries as well as from the federal ministry of information and the archives. It could be concluded from the results in Table 4 that the legislators do not go to Libraries to source for information.

The respondents were also requested to indicate whether they use the Imo State House of Assembly library. Their responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Do you use the IHA library

Option	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Yes	2	8.7
No	21	91.3
Total	23	100

Table 5 shows that only 2(8.7%) of the respondents agreed that they use the House of Assembly library. While 21 (91.3%) indicated that they do not use the library- Based on this results, it could be concluded that the legislators do not see the House of Assembly library as a place where they could obtain the type of information they need.

The respondents were also requested to state how they obtain the type of information they need. Their responses are shown in Table 6

Table 6: Ways of obtaining information

Option	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Self searching in the library	6	26
Through your personal Assistant (PA)	17	74
The librarian brings it to me	0	0
Total	23	100

It can be observed from the above Table 6, that 17(74%) respondents indicated that their personal Assistants (PAs) source and provide the information to them. None of the respondent indicated that the librarian brings the information to him. It could be concluded

that the librarians do not offer Current Awareness Services (CAS) and Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) services to the legislators.

The respondents were equally requested to state the problems they encountered in the process of seeking for the type of information they needed. Their responses are shown in the Table 8.

Table 7: Problems encountered.

	Types of problems	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
a.	Inadequate relevant information materials	7	30.43
b.	Inadequate time to seek for information	2	8.70
c.	Lack of information retrieval tools in the library	1	4.35
d.	Unconducive state of the library	7	30.43
e.	No knowledge of where to obtain the right information	4	17.39
f.	Non co-operative attitudes of the library staff.	2	8.70
	Total	23	100

It could be observed from the above table that those respondents who indicated inadequate information materials and unconducive state of the library ranked highest with 7(30.43%) respectively. This shows that the House of Assembly library does not have enough information materials in their stock and that the library is _not conducive for users to stay and do their reading. Lack of information retrieval system in the library ranked lowest with 1(4.35%). This shows that information retrieval systems may not be a major problem as the library staff are always available to assist,

CONCLUSION.

The findings of this study show that members of Imo State House of Assembly, Owerri needed information to perform their functions effectively. The findings also show that the legislators do not use the House of Assembly library because the library does not adequately meet their information needs. Newspapers and magazines are information materials mostly used by the legislators. Sometimes however they obtain information by listening to local radio and television programmes as well as cable network news (CNN).

Other sources of information to the legislators include circulars, and government press releases.

Based on the shortcomings of the House of Assembly library, the legislators most often source for information from other areas either by themselves or by proxy using their personal Assistants (PAs) to satisfy their information needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- a) Libraries and information centres should not limit their acquisition of information materials to a particular field of knowledge. The interest of parliamentarians should be considered by librarians while making choice of the type of information resources to be acquired for their libraries. Those information materials that would be very useful to members of the parliaments should be acquired and stocked in libraries.
- b) The Legislators should subscribe to as many newspaper and magazines titles as they can afford so that they will have regular supply of these information resources which carries the type of information they need.

- c) Legislators should spare enough time to listen to local radio and television programmes because such programmes could provide them with enough information needed to perform their legislative functions effectively.
 - d) The legislators should make use of the libraries while searching for information since libraries are reservoirs of assorted types of information materials both current and retrospective materials. Such information materials as can be found in libraries could provide the most needed, current and genuine pieces of information, which may turn out to be indispensable for their legislative functions.
 - e) Librarians in all types of libraries should assist the legislators by providing Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) and Current Awareness Services (CAS) to them. Such services should be geared towards ameliorating the difficulties encountered by the legislators in search of their peculiar information needs.
 - f) The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have made the search for information much easier. Legislators should avail themselves the opportunities offered by these new technologies in their search for information.
 - g) The legislators should also engage the services of professional librarians as personal Assistants (PAS) who by virtue of their training are experts in sourcing, searching and retrieving of information without much difficulties. This will save the legislators the stress and strain of sourcing for information on their own.
 - h) Libraries should provide information retrieval tools like catalogues, indexes, abstracts and bibliographies which are indispensable for quick retrieval of information from the libraries.
- Library guides should also be posted on the shelves to guide prospective users to locate information material without much difficulties.

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