

## Agencies and Media of Information Provision and Utilization by Women in Cooperative Activities in Imo State, Nigeria

**Dr. Nkechi Amaechi**

Senior Librarian  
Federal University of Technology  
Owerri, IMO State, Nigeria

**Dr. Jonathan Chima Ogugua**

Senior Librarian  
Federal University of Technology  
Owerri, IMO State, Nigeria

**Dr. Magnus Chukwuziem Unegbu**

Corresponding Author's  
Senior Librarian  
The College Library  
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education  
Owerri, IMO State, Nigeria  
e-mail: callongoff@yahoo.com

**Anne Anthony Edem**

Librarian II  
The University Library, Federal University of Technology  
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

***Abstract** - The general purpose of this study is agencies and media of information provision and utilization by women in cooperative activities in Imo State, Nigeria. The survey design research was used for the study using self constructed and validated questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The study adopted simple random method which was used to investigate 1,184 actual women respondents from the 27 LGAs in Imo State, Nigeria. Findings showed that none of the agencies had a monopoly of cooperative information provision of women in Imo State. The finding also showed that mass media, churches, schools, women groups, associations, community messengers/ town criers and friends' relation were the media of cooperative information dissemination to the women. Public library was found to have contributed the least in the provision of cooperative information to women in Imo State. The study recommends that women group activities should be intensified, this can be done by encouraging women to form new groups and expand old ones so that they can earn more money to improve their quality of life and benefit from government's development programmes. Again, that public libraries should be established in all the LGAs in Imo State and to be manned by trained manpower, this will enable the rural dwellers to have access to information and appreciate the usefulness of public libraries in their lives.*

**Key Words:** Agencies, Media, Information Provision, Utilization, Women, Cooperative Activities

### Introduction

There are many types of information available in the society and its use depends on the purpose for which it is sought for. One of the major types of information which empowers

and transforms man and society is economic information. The term economic information refers to any information which is aimed at informing people on economic matters in terms of activities, goods and services.

Women are critical and integral part of the economic process of the country, either in the formal or informal sector, urban or rural areas. The participation of women in the economic life of a country like Nigeria is only one aspect of their changing position in the society. Even globally, women have become increasingly visible. Etim (1995) posits that one would dare say that most topical issues in international or global development agenda is "women". Thus we have women issues, women concern, women in development etc. Varied as the definitions are, there is however, a global consensus that international development plans must include strategies for the integration of women into the development process.

Arguments have continued on the specific role women can play in the society. Women across the developing world are disadvantaged relative to men even when women constitute a major proportion of any country's population and have been found to be useful in every sphere of life. Today their roles are no longer limited to child bearing and home management (Arowolo and Achuko, 2010). However, tradition and customs in different regions and communities make men believe that women should be used rather than loved, worked rather than cared for, seen rather than be heard and as a result women have no voice, no right and little opportunity to improve their situation, (Awake, 1998). Eyinade (2010) however posits that women have nothing to lose by their participation in the social, economic and policy arena, rather the benefits are limitless. The author stresses that even though increasing number of women are providing leadership for blue chip companies, majority of women in Nigeria engage only minimally in economic development including farming cooperatives.

Cooperatives, in the view of Okwoche (1998) are suitable organizational framework for accelerated rural development and are useful instruments for the mobilization and sensitization of rural women about agricultural innovations. Cooperatives have contributed to and have served as avenue in which women have exercised their right to participation. They have found through the cooperative enterprise a route towards self-empowerment and development that works for them. Formation of cooperative society and financing of income generating projects provide opportunities for women to be leaders through democratic member control (Owojori and Oladejo 2009). Dogarawa (2005) argues that cooperative society provides a unique tool for achieving one or more economic goals in an increasing competitive global economy. Cooperatives are formed to meet people's mutual needs and they are based on the idea that together, a group of people can achieve their goals together. Cooperative society provides opportunities for millions of people in all economic sectors, particularly in the rural and urban low income groups, to escape poverty in a sustainable way. Owojori and Oladejo (2009) contend that statistics are not available, but is a general fact that cooperative is second only to government in employment, particularly in the south west of the country. Cooperative society is meant to provide its members with some benefits and opportunities which ordinarily will cost more if it is to be derived outside the cooperatives. Many rural women rely on cooperatives and market groups as a way to pool their resources, reduce their work load, and optimize limited income. In Nigeria according to Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) women have proved to be more than mere bench warming spectators even in the midst of the male-dominated professional congregation. For women to be actively involved in cooperative activities, they should be adequately sensitized through accurate and timely information. The significance of this research therefore lies in establishing the agencies and media of information provision and utilization by women in cooperative

activities Imo State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

- What is the influence of agencies that provide information on cooperative activities to women in Imo State, Nigeria?
- What is the influence of the media through which information on cooperative activities is made available to women in Imo State, Nigeria?

### **Review of Literature**

Though Nosheen, Ali and Ahmad (2010) note that there had been little research done on women information needs and access to appropriate information in developing countries, the extent of usage of information depends upon the building of information network and the development of information resources. People in the rural areas, literate or not literate should have access to any kind of information which will help them to become capable and productive in their social and political obligations to become better informed (Ode and Ape, 2012). To them, free and adequate information in any country is not a goal; it is also a means of bringing about desired social change.

Adebayo (2012) in his study of information needs and seeking behaviours of school principals, challenges for libraries where 106 principals of secondary schools were randomly selected reveals that principals (which include women) do utilized information in discharge of supervision duties in respect of their schools and that they consult both formal and informal formats and they rarely consult formats such as internet, seminar and workshop papers.

Zaid and Popoola (2010) studied information accessibility and utilization as correlate of quality of life of rural women in by which they adopted the descriptive research design of the expo-facto type, and sampled of 5000 rural women selected purposively from 10 local Government Areas in Ekiti State. The research shows that the relationship between information utilization and quality of life of the rural women were strong, positive and significant. This indicates that the rural women's access to information significantly correlates with their quality of life in Ekiti State.

Bakar and Alhadri (2009) in their work captioned seeking access to health information adopted a survey research method in which 80 housewives were sampled and only 51 housewives returned the questionnaire. The investigation find out 82.4% of the women need information on finance, 80.4 needs information on child education and religion, 70.6% need information on foods, 68% require information on health while 51% need information on home beautification. There is no hard and fast rule as to what medium of information dissemination is most appropriate in the rural communities. Medium of information dissemination varies considerably with the goal or the information source and the message content as it affects a given set or audience.

However, Uhegbu (2004) argues that provision, accessibility and utilization of information are related and that the effect of one generates concomitant effect on the other. The author stresses that information can only be utilized if it is accessible and that accessibility of information can only be possible if it is provided. In the global world with rich information

flows coming from many different sources and channels, an organization's ability to manage knowledge effectively becomes a prerequisite for success and innovations.

Nosheen, Ali and Ahmad (2010) observe that the reliability of information provided by various information sources play important role in building reputation among their clients as well as sustainability of long term integrity of the source of information under consideration. According to Revere (2007), accessibility, relevance, trust-worthiness, currency, quality, and reliability of an information source's can determine whether an information need is met or is not fulfilled. They concluded that limited access to needed information is major obstacle to its utilization.

Ukachi (2005) in her study of information needs, sources, and information seeking behaviour of rural women in the Badagry, Lagos using a descriptive survey method and sampled 200 women. The research found that rural women did not have access to adequate information because the libraries as well as the local government whose responsibility it is to inform the rural dwellers were inefficient. Which make the rural women in Lagos not to be provided with information Provision and dissemination of information to the people especially the rural dwellers could be a combination of both oral and written. Provision has to do with making information available to people while dissemination has to do with making information reach the target audience, in this case women in Imo state.

The effectiveness of a given dissemination strategy depends on factors such as the characteristics of the innovation, the target audience, and the information channel. The strategy that works well for transmitting general information to the masses may be inappropriate for communicating specific research findings to policy makers. The strategy that works well for diffusing technological innovations among organizations may not be compatible with dissemination strategies linked to the development of third world countries. Strategies designed for reaching one minority group may not fit well with another minority group. Getting the proper fit among the innovation, information channel, purpose, and target audience is important. While the consumers approach will help facilitate the dissemination process in ways not possible under the old paradigm, understanding channels for communication and how these are changing is essential to effective utilization efforts under either paradigm.

Nosheen, Ali and Ahmad (2010) in a study on analysis of gender specific sources of information regarding home and farm practices in Potohar region identified and divided sources of information into two categories, one conventional and the other non-conventional or modern. Their study reveals that for females, television followed by friends, relatives, radio and local farmers were their most frequently used sources of information. For the generation of effective and valid results, the effective use of various sources of information is essential. Reliability of information provided by various information sources plays important role in building reputation among their clients as well as sustainability of information flow.

The sources or media of information provision and the format in which information is disseminated is relevant for such information to be easily accessed and utilized. Information could be obtained from a computer, book, a government agency, non- governmental agencies, a film and other possible sources.

Olamiyi, Adebayo and Akintola (2011) in recognition of the significance of information in technology transfer opined that the emergence of information economy as a global phenomenon that organized production, conscious utilization of information and effective

and efficient deployment of information is increasingly becoming the basis for creativity, productivity and profitability.

**Methodology**

The descriptive survey research design was used for this study using questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was titled Agencies and Media of Information Provision and Utilization by Women in Cooperative Activities Imo State Questionnaire (AMIPUQ). The population of the study is 1,951,092 respondents. This comprised all the females who have attained the age of 18 years and above who reside in Imo State, Nigeria. The study used Taro Yarmanne (1967) formular to arrive at 1,184. To select actual women respondents from the 27 LGAs in Imo State, Nigeria, simple random sampling was used.

**Analysis**

A total of 1,184 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to actual women respondents from the 27 LGAs in Imo State, Nigeria. Out of these 950 copies of the questionnaire were duly completed and return for analysis giving a response rate of (80.2%).

**Research Question 1: What is the influence of the agencies on the provision of information on cooperative activities to women in Imo State?**

**Table 1: The t-test Results on Agencies that Provide Information on Cooperative Activities**

	<i>Agencies</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>t Value</i>	<i>Prob</i>	<i>Decision</i>
(a)	Public library	950	2.21	1	-8.833	1	Not Significant
(b)	Local government community development unit	950	2.73	1.1	6.181	<0.0001	Significant
(c)	Ministry of Commerce and Industry	950	2.59	1.1	2.633	0.0043	Significant
(d)	National Council for Women Society/ Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development	950	2.83	1	10.07	<0.0001	Significant
(e)	National Orientation Agency (NOA)	950	2.4	1.2	-2.718	0.9967	Not Significant
	<b>Significant Mean = 2.6</b>						

Table 1 revealed that out of the five information providing agencies and institutions, only three were found to have provided information on cooperative activities to the women in Imo State. These agencies that provide information on cooperative activities to the women were the local government office that oversees community development matters (X = 6.181, P-value = < 0.0001), Ministry of Commerce and Industry (X= 2.633, P value = < 0.0001) and National Council for women Society alongside Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development (X= 10.66 P value = < 0.0001). Surprisingly, two key information service

agencies namely Public Library and National Orientation Agency (NOA) were seen to have played insignificant role in providing to women with information on cooperative activities as they exhibited negative mean values.

### Research Question 2: What is the influence of the media through which information on Cooperative activities is made available to the women in Imo State?

**Table 2: The t-test Results on Media of Information on Cooperative Activities**

	<i>Media of information dissemination</i>	<i>Obs</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std Dev</i>	<i>t Value</i>	<i>Prob</i>	<i>Decision</i>
(a)	Mass Media (radio, TV, Newspaper, etc)	950	2.46	1.1	-1.054	0.854	Not Significant
(b)	Churches, Mosques, Schools	950	2.2	1.1	-8.388	1	Not Significant
(c)	Women groups / associations	950	2.53	1.1	0.916	0.18	Not Significant
(d)	Community messengers / town criers	950	2.69	1.1	5.316	<0.0001	Significant
(e)	Friends / Relations	950	2.9	1	12.48	<0.0001	Significant
	<b>Significant Mean = 2.7</b>						

Table 2 showed that mass media (radio, television and newspapers), churches/mosques and women groups/association were found not to be effective channels for dissemination of information on cooperative activities to women as they showed negative mean values. This may be as a result of the fact that the women did not have the time to listen to news on radio and television or have access to daily newspapers. It may also be that church sermons never talked about cooperative matters or the women groups/associations incapacitated in carrying out information on cooperative societies. The result on Table 2 however shows that information on cooperative activities were better disseminated to the women through community town criers/messengers and friends and relations. This showed that informal channels have become the most effective channel to disseminate information to women especially those at rural areas.

### Findings

Findings on Table 1 revealed that there were three agencies that provide information on cooperative activities to women in Imo State. The influence of these three agencies were significant in the provision of cooperative information to the women ( $X = 50.12$ ;  $p\text{-value} = < 0.0001$ ). The three agencies were local government community development unit ( $X = 2.73$ ), Ministry of Commerce and Industry ( $X = 2.59$ ,  $p\text{-value} = < 0.0001$ ) and National Council of Women Society and the Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development ( $X = 2.83$ ,  $p\text{-value} = < 0.0001$ ). This finding buttresses IFLA's (1995) argument on the merit of many agencies getting involved in public information enlightenment. IFLA believes that the more the agencies involved in public information provision, the more the people will have more access to accurate and timely information especially if the agencies/institutions adopt methods that the target audience will find familiar, easy to use and less expensive to access. However, against the backdrop of the criticality and popularity of public libraries as the main agency for information provision, public library was found to be insignificant in the provision of information on cooperative activities to the women in Imo State. This confirms the fears of

Nwokocha (1993) and Odi (1996) that performance of public libraries *in* public information provision, particularly in Nigeria has continued to remain abysmally low which may affect any value or appreciation of the people of public library as a public institution. It may also impair any public support to the development of public library in Nigeria in terms of financial support or otherwise from the people.

Evidence from Table 2 showed that women had many ways through which they received information on cooperative matters. The media included mass media such as radio, television, newspapers, churches, mosques, schools, women groups/associations, community messengers/town criers, friends/relation, etc. The variety of channels of information dissemination would lead to increased chances of the women having access to available cooperative news and this might contribute to the elimination of information hoarding and distortions. However, the revelation showed that only community/town criers, women groups and associations and friends/relations were more effective and significant in the provision of information on cooperative matters to the women. The findings that; friends and relations, women groups/associations, town criers were the effective channels for cooperative information dissemination to most of the women deviates from the work of Fayose (1997) that radio was a major channel of information to the people especially at the grassroots. This situation may be due to the specialized nature of cooperative information which may not be of particular interest to many women and as such many of them may be unwilling to listen to the radio anytime such news was aired. Uhegbu (2004) on his study reveals that attitude, orientation, unavailability and tight domestic chores could be some of the reasons why radio did not find special appeal to women in Imo State as a major channel of information dissemination. The fact that friends, relations, town criers, women groups and associations showed their effectiveness in information dissemination to the women, supports the findings of Opeke (2000) that indigenous sources of information dissemination were very effective in information access to rural areas because the people regard them as trustworthy, supportive, open minded, flexible, attractive and radiates affection during interactions with such channels or sources. It could therefore buttress the appropriateness of these channels in information provision especially cooperative information. As such any information passed through them will certainly reach the women and make the desired impact on them.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following are recommended;

- Women group activities should be intensified. This can be done by encouraging women to form new groups and expand old ones so that they can earn more money to improve their quality of life and benefit from government's development programmes.
- In-built information channels (mechanisms) are necessary in designing programmes for woman's group activities. Consequently, they should be strengthened and deployed regularly.
- Both government and non-governmental organizations should be more involved in women's group activities by providing information and monitor the utilization of such for their improvement.
- Public libraries should be established in all the LGAs in the State to be manned by trained manpower. This will enable the rural dwellers to have access to information and appreciate the usefulness of public libraries in their lives.
- Vigorous women centered enlightenment campaigns be organized through conferences, workshops and seminars. Such brainstorming exercise should involve

both men and women. Language of discussion should be vernacular. This will help to arouse cooperative society consciousness among the women.

- Use of mass media in the dissemination of cooperative information to the women should be de-emphasized as many of them hardly had access to newspapers, radio and television. The church/mosque/school should be more involved in the dissemination of cooperative information to the women as these have been found to be more effective, highly preferred and more convenient to the women.

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