

## Chapter 7

# Information Access for Rural Women in Nigeria

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Adequate access and effective use of information is succinctly linked to sustainable development and empowerment of rural women. Analysis of the situation reveals that Nigerian rural women face marginalization as far as information access is concerned. This chapter identified some channels and preferred sources of information for the rural women with their inherent challenges. Some implications were also discussed ranging from exploitation and trafficking of women, inability to access and harness agriculture and health information, credit facilities and government programs. Some challenges of information provision to rural women as identified include lack of basic infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy, culture, and religion. The study recommended some strategies for improvement as regards quality access to information: establishment of vibrant public libraries in rural areas, continuous research on information seeking behaviour of rural women, information repackaging, provision of adult educational centres. The chapter concluded that neglect of rural women can only portend danger*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Information is an important resource for empowerment and development. The right to be informed is the right of every citizen in a democratic dispensation. Right to information should be understood as the right to access and obtain any official information by the public. When citizens have access to information they are inclined to make invaluable decisions, hold informed opinions without interference and influence policies that affect the society. Nigeria has a written information policy covering rural communities. The Act makes adequate provision for the information needs of different categories of the citizens. (Enonche, 2012). The existence of Freedom of Information act or bill does not necessarily guarantee access. Basic infrastructure including internet connectivity and other information technology (IT) resources must be on ground to guarantee access. Information services in Africa and Nigeria in particular are focused on urban areas leading to neglect of the rural areas. According to Ifijeh, Iwu-james and Adebayo (2016), information and communication technology (ICT) facilities in Nigeria are limited to urban areas and at exorbitant rates, affordable by the middle and upper classes of society, making many of the rural and suburban areas unable to fully participate in the emerging information economy. Furthermore, the Guardian (2017) reveals that rural communities' are being left out of modern society and the 21st century economy. They have:

- Far less internet access than urban areas
- Inadequate/lack of high-speed wired connections
- Very weak wireless phone services

Though there are about 90 million internet users in Nigeria, there is still a group of over 53 per cent of the citizens who are not connected to the internet especially in rural areas (The Guardian, 2017). Absence of technological infrastructure leads to marginalization and creates a digital divide (Idiegbeyan-Ose, Olalekan, Ilo & Odion, 2015).

Hilbert (2011) alarmingly posited that the widest gender digital divide is in Africa. Rural-urban divide poses a challenge in Nigeria just like every other country across the world. Quoting the World Bank, The Guardian (2017) reported that issues of gender-related digital divide form part of the major discourse of governance and state institutions but the required action is not displayed. Antonio and Tuffley (2014) opined that even though there appears to be arguments in disaggregating gender-specific information regarding access and use of the internet in developing nations, men undoubtedly have greater access to the internet than women.

In agreement with the above assertion, the British Council Gender in Nigeria Report (2012) submitted that majority of the women living in developing countries suffer more gender-related discrimination than their counterparts in developed countries and have worse life chances compared to men and even their counterparts in other societies. Their findings reveal that they are more likely to face unemployment and have less educational opportunities. They are often trapped and stuck by traditional cultures and values that prefer to keep them in the background limiting their potential and denying them access to basic digital literacy skills.

The need for information access cannot be overemphasized. All types of research, be it medical, economic, political, educational, social, agricultural, medical, and a host of other scientific breakthroughs often disseminate their findings through various channels, but how much of this beneficial information will ever reach the rural women.

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