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Information Needs of Policy Makers in Nigeria: The Case of Imo State Civil Service

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Introduction

The civil service as an essential government agency has a major role to play in planning and policy making. For policy making to be effective, there must be accurate planning. Planning begins with the gathering of relevant data and information on the proposed project. The information/data available determines whether the decision taken will be feasible or not.

Information is therefore very important for proper planning. Information is presently used to measure the wealth of any nation (Uhegbu and Nwokocha, 1998). It is now collected, stored, maintained and transmitted, applied bought and sold-all at a price. It has become a factor of production equal to land labour capital (Hughes, 1991). It is the life wire of societies and of the government. It is infact the basis of decision making and decisions can be as good as the information on which they are based. It is obvious that the Nigerian development objectives such as production of more food, improvement of standard of living, the provision of better health services, good education, sound economy and generation of knowledge through research required continued support. This is also true of government planning bodies involved in the co-ordination of various development programmes in the country (Aiyepku, 1989).

In the civil service current and authentic information is required by policy maker at the states of policy formulation, planning, monitoring, decision making plan implementation and evaluation. The policy maker/senior civil servants form bulk of planner and initiators. For them to perform their duties effectively they need up to date information. In view of the key role of civil service in policy making and the important of information for development, it has become necessary to know the information needs of these senior civil servants to help them base their decisions on current, accurate and relevant data.

Purpose of the Study

The aims and objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the information needs of senior civil servants in Imo State Nigeria.

2. To find out the extent to which the senior civil servants are satisfied with the services provided by government libraries.
3. To determine the sources of information
4. To identify the factors militating against access to information needs of senior civil servants.

Statement of the Problem

The positive impact of the policies made by senior civil servants is not felt by Imo State Citizens in particular and Nigeria in general. The services provided by the government which are based on these policies and decisions of policy makers are not adequate. This has resulted in continued economic deterioration with the result that people are fed up with the government. The issue at stake is that these senior civil servant/policy makers plan without data and facts. They engage in what Alegbeleye (1996) called "best guess estimating" "planning without fact" and "disjointed incrementalism".

Literature Review

Information is difficult to define. Opara (2003) sees information as capable of provoking action or inaction in a recipient. Information is also seen as an input which reduces the level of uncertainty in an individual or organization in decision process (Onasoke, 2005). Ratz (2007) sees information need as a gap in a person's knowledge that when experienced at the conscious level as a question gives rest to a search for answers. The civil servants need information in the performance of their official duties.

Ayepoku (1983) defined the scope of the information needs of civil servants in a manner that will reinforce the concept of development need to resolve around the activities carried out by civil servants. These activities include finding facts, assessing trends, and diagnosing problems, identifying the needs, prescribing solution programmes and projects, operating programmes and projects, assessing impact of action and evaluating successes and failures. Information needs arise whenever individual finds themselves in a situation requiring knowledge to deal with situation as they deem fit (Tackie and Adams 2007:69)

Tiamiyu (1991) looked at information needs by also identifying work activities carried out in the civil service. These work activities included evaluating project proposal, communicating with other ministries, publishing information on projects, implementing and inspecting projects writing reports on public policy issues, summarizing reports, gathering statistical information/data, evaluating reports compiled by others, carrying out general administrative duties and providing direct public services among others.

Tiamiyu (1991) further stated that civil servants need statistical information, directory information, procedural information, tax administration and general administrative information.

Information is in fact needed by policy makers, politicians, executives and people from all walks of life, (Gupta, 1988).

The sources of the information needs include newspaper, magazines, learned journals, books, monographs, in-house memoranda, (files), indexes, abstracts, conference proceedings, these and dissertation, bulletin from the private sector, government publications, consultancy reports and feasibility reports (Aiyepoku, 1989).

On factors affecting access to information needs of government establishment, Akhidime (1996) identified the following; poor manpower, inadequate materials and equipment, the type of services rendered in the libraries, lack of awareness of importance of libraries and poor funding. Alegbeleye (1996) in his own contribution also identified some constraint to information needs. They include inadequate file classification inappropriate quality of paper and file covers which tend to deteriorate over time, mutilation and theft of government document, storage problem, absence of training for librarian and poor working condition of librarians.

Methodology

In the process of conducting this research, four ministries in Imo State were studied. The Ministries were Agriculture and Natural Resources; Commerce, and Industry; Information and Finance. The nominal roles of these ministries were used to identify all senior civil servants/policy makers from grade level 12 to 16. A total of 370 senior civil servants from Grade levels 12 to 16 in the ministries stated above formed the population of

the study. The sample was made up of 123 respondents picked from 370, the population, by the use of table of random numbers. The sample was drawn on sampling ratio of 1.3. The ratio of 1.3 is used because a researcher is expected to use at least 10% of the total population (Ogunfitimi, 1986). The questionnaire and oral interview were used as instrument for collecting data. Some of the questionnaire items like work activities and types of information needs were extracted from the literature reviewed especially those of (Aiyepoku, 1989 and Tiamiyu, 1991).

A total of 102 usable questionnaires were returned out of 123 administered to the respondents. This implies that 82.9% of usable questionnaires were returned.

Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

The analysis of data is as follows:

SCHEDULE OF DUTIES/WORK ACTIVITIES: The finding shows that 35.0% of the policy makers engaged in the gathering of statistical data, 14.6% engaged in general administrative activities, 14.6% also attended meeting within and outside the ministries, 12.4% of the respondents are involved in evaluation of projects proposals and reports, 5.1% engaged in publishing and dissemination of information on plans and projects; 5.1% carried out implementation and inspection of projects and programmes. 5.1% of the respondents carried out finance and supplies duties, 4.4% engaged writing and summarizing of reports while 3.7% carried out secretarial duties.

The implication of this finding is that the government libraries should assist the policy makers by providing for them statistical data, materials on general administration, information on the writing of technical reports, presentation, monitoring, implementation and evaluation of projects.

Information Needs

97.1% respondents indicated that they need information in the performance of their official duties while 2.9% of the respondents did not need information. The response here shows that policy makers/senior civil servants need information in the performance of their official duties. The government libraries should respond by providing these policies makers/senior civil servants with the right kind of information they need for the performance of their official duties effectively.

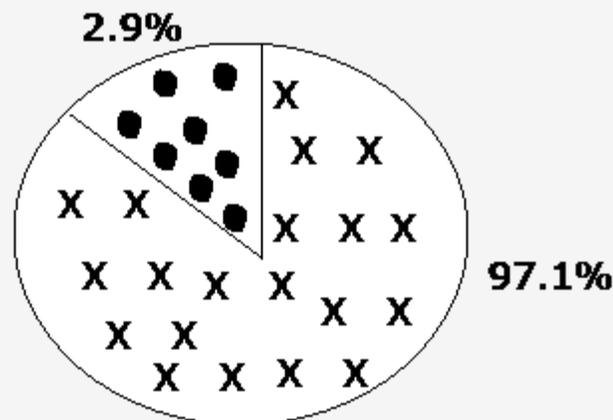


Fig. 1 Information needs.

Types of Information Needs

Based on the literature reviewed, especially those of Tiamiyu (1991) and Aiyepoku (1983) nine major types of information needs of policy makers were identified and used to collect data. These types of information needs include:

1. Statistical information

2. Government information
3. Directory information
4. Administrative information
5. Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Information
6. Finance and Supplies information
7. Technical information
8. Research information
9. Marketing and Distribution information.

These information needs identified above scored 26.23%, 24.59%, 14.21%, 10.93%, 7.19%, 6.01%, 5.46%, 3.28% and 3/19% respectively.

The result here indicated that the government libraries need to provide more information on the areas of statistics, government information, directory information and administrative information, which ranked first, second and third respectively.

Availability of Information Needs

67.0% of the respondents indicated that their information needs are not available and 29.4% agreed that their information needs are available. The response of the policy makers tally with the findings of Alegbeleye (1996),

the information needs of the respondents to enable them make good policies.

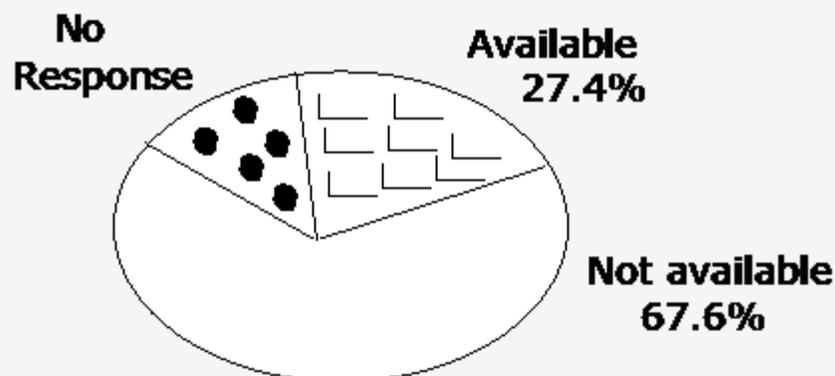


Fig. 2 Availability of information needs

Types of Information Sources Consulted

The highest percentage of the respondents 20.83% use in-house memoranda (internal files), 17.86 use government publications while 15.48 use newspapers/popular magazine, 13.69% had personal contact with the professionals who could provide the information the policy makers needed in government establishments, in order words the policy makers went to professionals civil servants and those in private sector who could provide the information they needed. Moreover those who use conference proceedings, journals, Thesis and dissertation; Books and Monographs; and Radio/T.V programmes scored 10.71%, 6.55%, 5.59%, 5.36% and 3.59% respectively. Most of the respondents who were interviewed indicated that all the sources of information listed are useful to them.

In the process of providing those information sources, quality should be the watchword, since information according to Igwe (1986) is as good as its source. The finding here indicated that the respondents use more than one type of information sources.

Adequacy of Government Libraries in Imo State

In order to get the desired information, a four-point scale "very good", "Good", "Fair", and "below

standards"-was used. The highest number of respondents 53.9% said that the government libraries were "fair" while 17.7% indicated that government libraries were "good". However there was no response for "very good".

With the above response, it is quite obvious that the government libraries do not provide adequate services to their respondents. This means that urgent steps need to be taken to resuscitate these libraries; it implies that the entire State Civil Service may not be healthy. In order to confirm the responses of the senior civil servants/policy makers, the librarians of the ministries under study were interviewed in order to find out their resources.

The interview revealed that Ministries of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR), Ministry of Commerce, and Industry, Ministry of Information and Ministry of Finance do not have enough journal titles and few current journal titles which are made up of gifts from international organization. There were few seats, tables, shelves and fans. Air-conditioners were absent. Computers, photocopying machines, telephone, microform, cassette, video, Radio and Television were absent. The average numbers of users per day were 10 for MANR, 15 for Commerce and Industry, 18 for Information and 20 for Finance. These libraries are not adequately funded. The provisions made in the budget are mere formalities as little or nothing is released for the libraries.

Moreover the size of the Libraries 9.6m x 4.2m, 3m x 4.2m, 7.2m x 3.6m and 9m x 4.2m for ministries of Agriculture, Commerce and Industry and Tourism, Information Culture Youths and Sports do not seem to be adequate since an average special library may require at least an area of 2000 square feet (185.8 square metres) (Ahrensfield and Christianson, and King, 1981).

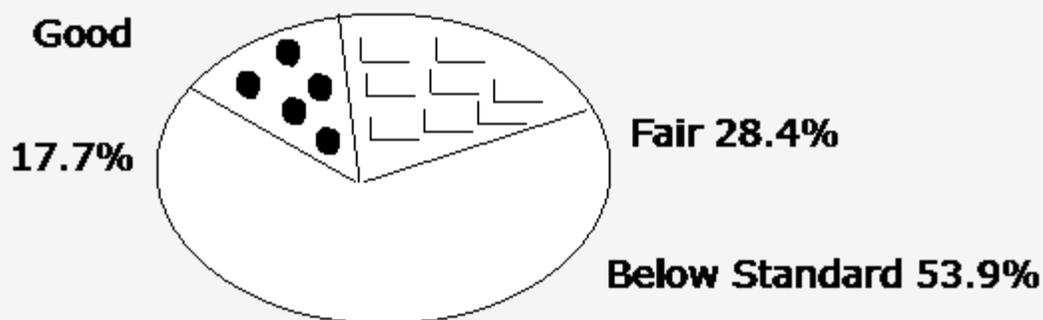


Fig. 3: Adequacy of Government Libraries.

Factors Affecting Access Information Needs of Policy Makers in Imo State

22.70% of the respondents indicated that numerous unpublished documents were tucked away in files marked "Confidential" or "restricted". 17.15% of the respondents indicated that lack of the knowledge that information relevant for decision making existed was a major problem. 14.18% of the respondents showed that the inability of government libraries to supply or anticipate demand was a problem. The inability of policy makers to recognize the role of government libraries; information not adapted to suit the local situation; and lack of selective Dissemination of Information scored 14.18%, 12.06%, 8.15% while those who indicated all of the above scored 10.64%. It has to be noted that the respondents ticked more than one factors.

Problems Identified in the Study

In the first place, the information for development that is generated by government establishments are not made accessible to policy makers and other users of information. The development information, data and statistics are kept in file marked "secret" or confidential and are not made accessible to people who need them. In other words large percentage of devilment information in Nigeria belongs to grey literatures which are kept in files. They are not published and therefore people do not have access to them. In view of the fact that the information required is not available policy makers make use of any data available to them or plan without facts. This is infact a very ugly trend. It is obvious that meaningful growth and development cannot be achieved in a country where facts and accurate data are not used in planning.

Secondly the government libraries which are supposed to provide materials for the policy makers are not adequate. Both the government libraries and other types of libraries lack book and non-book materials. The few materials available in these libraries are out dated and not relevant to the needs of the policy makers. While the world is talking about Information and Communication Technology, Nigerians are not in the position to join because of obvious reasons: The Internet, Worldwide Web, E-mail services are not available in most Nigerian Libraries. Internet connectivity exists in few places. Nigeria is not yet directly connected to internet. The problem is that power supply is not reliable and Nigerian Telecommunications Ltd. (NITEL) Infrastructure has low capacity for the internet. Its standard analogue voice line has a maximum of 19.2 kilobytes per second (Kbps).

Its leased digital line has only 64 kilobytes per second (Kbps). NITEL therefore requires several 64kbps to cope with base access tools like World Wide Web (Ojo-Igbinoba, 1997).

Furthermore, most policy makers are not aware of the places where they can get information for decision making and they do not recognize the role of government libraries in information dissemination. Most policy makers do not go to the library for information needed in decision making. This could explain the reason why government libraries and in fact all types of libraries in the country are starved of fund. Maybe the problem of not going to the library is because Nigeria is an oral culture and Nigeria is still trying to imbibe reading culture.

It was just on the 24th of May 2001 that the Nigerian Government announced that a national policy on information technology has been developed. The major problem is that the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology produced the information policy single handedly. The information professionals like librarians in Nigeria were not involved. Not even a single librarian was selected from the Nigerian Library Association for this policy. The issue is that since many information professionals were not involved, the National information policy may not achieve the desired objective.

Moreover infrastructural facilities like electricity, fax, telephones are not adequate. There is erratic power supply.

Moreover selective dissemination of information (SDI) is lacking in the libraries and the little information available is not packaged to suit the local situation. The library materials are mainly gifts from foreign countries are not relevant to our needs.

In addition there is very poor information management in Nigeria because of poverty, corruption and political instability.

Conclusion

Although this study does not claim to be exhaustive, yet the information needs of policy makers have been identified. This study also identified the work activities of the policy makers. Armed with these activities, the libraries will be in the position to provide the information needs of policy makers in Imo State and Nigeria in general.

Moreover the factors affecting access to information needs of policy makers were also identified. They include among others absence of information technology.

Recommendations

In the first place, a high response to document tucked away in files marked secret or confidential is a food for thought. The reason for generation of data/information is to use it in enhancing human and economic development. If this need cannot be met as a result of administrative reasons rather than reasons of substance, it then means that the society does not seem to be growing. There is therefore the urgent need to bring out criteria for tagging some development literature as "confidential" or "restricted". This is where an information policy comes in. Nigeria is overdue for a good information policy developed through consultation which will spell out issues concerning, generation, storage, use and dissemination of information.

A good information policy for Nigeria will be in the position to spell out information that will be restricted and those that will be made available to people who need them. The formulation of national information policy will mean enactment of legislation by government.

Secondly, the government libraries should embrace the use of information and communications technology. The need to have good telephone network (digital telephone) internet, email and World Wide Web. In order to achieve this all important objective, Nigerian telecommunication ltd (NITEL) should be made to cope with the demands of information and communications technology. Internet which has turned the world into a global village need to be full embraced by Nigeria. The answer for efficient information provision and use for government decision making in Nigeria lies in information and communications technology, and the sooner the government invests heavily in this area, the better for the country's development.

Moreover the policy maker needs to be educated through seminars and conference to enable them be conversant with how to use the library and the importance of information in decision making. This would enable them to know more about the importance of information in policy making and national development and thereby work towards equipping libraries.

In addition librarian should be trained as information officers to enable them cope with recent development in information retrieval, storage and dissemination. Improvement of the knowledge of librarians in the government services and other sectors of the country's economy will help in effective information management. In view of the fact that information management aims principally at making the right kind of information available at the right time in appropriate medium, the use of trained manpower and information technology for processing, packaging and organization of information is very essential.

Finally, adequate interlibrary lending facilities should be jointly established by government libraries, Academic and research libraries, public and special libraries in Nigeria. The various libraries should engage in resource sharing as no single library is capable of proving all the need to its clientele. Information and communication technology (ICT) will also play a major role in this regard.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE OF INFORMATION NEEDS OF POLICY MAKERS/SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS IN IMO STATE

This questionnaire is administered to enable the researcher to collect data on the information needs of policy makers/senior civil servants in Imo State Nigeria.

This is entirely for research purposes and any information gathered will be treated as such. Thank you for your anticipated co-operation.

Yours Sincerely,

Emmanuel Anyanwu.

Please check in appropriate boxes and make comments where necessary.

1. Ministry

2. Department .

3. Division ..

4. Designation

5. Academic Qualification

6. Sex: Male Female

7. Age: (i) 25-34 years

(ii) 35-44 years

(iii) 45-54 years

(iv) 55-64 years

8 Schedule of duties and responsibilities

9(a) Do you need information in the performance of your official duties?

Yes No

9(b) If "Yes" What type of information do you need.

1. Statistical information
2. Directory information
3. Research information
4. Administrative information
5. Planning, monitoring and evaluation

information

1. Technical information
2. Government information
3. Marketing and Distribution information
4. Finance and Supplies information

9(c) Please break down your information needs up to departments, divisions and sections.

10. Are your information needs available? In the government libraries? Yes No

11. What are the types of information sources you consult in order to obtain data/information relevant for decision/policy making.

(i) Newspapers and popular magazines

(ii) Journals

(iii) Books and other monographs

(iv) Conference proceedings

(v) Thesis and dissertation

(vi) Government publications

(vii) Personal contact

(viii) Other. Please specify.

12. Are you satisfied with the quality of services offered by government libraries? Yes No

13. Rate of the adequacy of resources and facilities of government libraries.

(i) Very good

(ii) Good

(iii) Fair

(iv) Below Standard

14. What factors affect access to information needs of senior civil servants/policy makers in Imo State?

(i) Problem of knowing that information relevant for decision and policy makers exist

(ii) Most of the information available are not adapted to suit the local situation

(iii) Libraries neither supply information relevant to the needs of senior civil servants/policy makers nor anticipate such needs.

(iv) Inability of policy makers/senior civil servants to recognize the role of government libraries

(v) Lack of SDI Services (selective Dissemination of Information)

(vi) Numerous unpublished documents tucked away in file marked confidential or restricted.

(vii) Other. Please specify.

15. Make recommendation on how information needs of policy makers/senior civil servants could be met satisfactorily.

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