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MAKE THE CHILDREN READ: PARTICIPATORY RURAL APPROACH IN SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN UMUERI, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

School library is desirable because it provides a wide range of reading and multimedia resources. The essence is to support teaching and learning, fostering reading culture and lifelong learning. The rural schools and the children are part of this proposition. It also behooves on the rural dwellers to participate and contribute in community development to ensure learning and literacy sustainability. This study examines the rural school libraries with regards to participatory rural appraisal for community driven development. It is a qualitative study that involved physical assessment of rural schools with community based monitors. Techniques for data collection were focus group discussion, key informant interview and discussions in community groups. It was discovered that out of twelve government primary and secondary schools that only two has small spaces created for library. The participatory approach devised means of community contribution which created result in book donations. These were distributed to all the rural schools in the community. It was recommended that duty bearers and school board should provide library facilities in the rural schools just as in urban schools. Communities should also drive their own development to promote literacy for their children and sustainability

**Key words: children, community, development, participatory appraisal, reading culture,
rural school library**

Introduction

Every child deserves good education. It is not just an obligation but a right for every child, even the child in the poor rural community. This is about literacy because it matters. A child who grows up in a poor rural community may never be able to see the rest of the world but with exposure to books through the support of school library, he could be creative, informed, knowledgeable (Sokari, 2013) and exhibit the trait of a well cultured individual. These children want to access the world outside their villages and move on to higher education. They need opportunities to grow; they need good practices in school libraries.

The concept of rural community is non-metropolitan. It readily creates the images of social constructed understanding which could be the reason many remote poor rural schools and libraries are evidenced by dilapidated buildings (Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC) ,2014). Agreeably, government of different dispensations in Nigeria has tried through various programs to develop and reform education sectors. Even the 2015 approved estimates of Anambra State Government of Nigeria (2014, p. 163) under enhancing skills and knowledge, made provisions for purchase of library books and rehabilitation/repair of school libraries. Yet, many of these programs have failed to reach the rural poor, especially those in remote underserved areas.

Even researchers seem more drawn to city school libraries than rural community schools. Developing reading culture is not easy but learning can actually take place where there are guided strategies by collaboration among the teachers, librarians, parents and the community stakeholders. It will provide the necessary media resources of categories of learners from the

slowest learner in the kindergarten to the most intelligent senior in the high school through the provision of print and non print materials to aid learning (Busayo, 2011). Nothing can compare to literacy. Thus, developing the school libraries and making the children to read will help them become college and career ready students (Perez, 2014), thereby fulfilling the objective of school libraries which are - supporting literacy, aiming to create a culture of reading both inside and outside the classroom.

It is widely acknowledged that a school library is a very important factor in the educational sector, enhancing academic excellence, as well as being the heart and soul of the educational system (Daniel, 2004 and Adeniji, 2006

IFLA/UNESCO school library manifesto emphasized the importance of school library in teaching and learning for all (IFLA, 2015). The guidelines were made to inform decision makers at national and local levels to give support and guidance to the library community, to help schools to implement the principles expressed in the manifesto and used within a local context. It is pertinent to state here that in Nigeria, the School Library Association is focused on the development of school libraries/school library media centres, school librarianship and reading culture in Nigeria. It has collaborated with government ministries and agencies in supporting development of effective school library/resource centre programme and the reading culture of the Nigerian child

In Anambra state, Nigeria, it is interesting to note that all the schools are being renovated, but the aspect of upgrading the libraries alongside the school buildings, especially in the rural

communities is being overlooked. Could it be that libraries are taken for granted? The school libraries in the city are better off, probably, because it is easier to raise funds in metropolitan districts (Deweese, 1999). The disparity and inequities between the school libraries in the city and the poor rural communities requires attention because, all the children in Nigeria use the same syllables, write the same examinations and are judged with the same bench marks for admissions in the tertiary institutions.

School libraries are supposed to be the same all over since children are adjudged to the same rights and privileges. But in rural communities, majority of the poor, rural schools are not served with school libraries. Libraries are simply scarce which is the reason schools in these remote communities often function without textbooks for their students or manuals for their teachers (Parry, 2008). This affects quality learning and could prevent the rural children from reaching their true educational potentials. It is saddening in the rural community of Umueri where there is dire lack of rural school libraries to provide reading materials for pupils and students, knowing full well that many children in this environment have never own story books nor given the opportunity to visit library and engage in coordinated reading culture. Unfortunately, the community stakeholders viewed all these anomalies and did not know that they could transform their communities and participate in making things better for their children and themselves. This study is therefore aimed at identifying the rural school libraries and their problems with particular reference to Umueri, a rural community in Anambra, South East, Nigeria.

Umueri is one of the ten communities in Anambra East local government area of Anambra state in Nigeria. It is situated in the South-Eastern Nigeria with an estimated population of 942,000.00. It is an igbo speaking community located within the riverine of Anambra valley popularly known as *Omabala* River. This community is believed to be first area of human settlement east

of the Niger. It is a fishing and agrarian community that is endowed with fertile soil for farming, natural reserve forests and other natural resources. Umueri is located in the popular Otuocho area with good road network connecting Onitsha and its environment.

It is the headquarters of Anambra East local government area and has General Hospital, Town Hall, Recreation Club House, schools, markets, etc. Today there are many groups of people as well as ethnic groups living in Umueri. Recently, the sitting Governor of Anambra state flagged off the 8.5 kilometer Aguleri-Otuocho-Umueri Airport dual carriageway (Channels Television, 2015). Umueri is a fast developing community because of the proposed air port establishment.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to identify the rural school libraries in relation to participatory driven community development. Specifically, this study aim to:

1. Identify the rural school libraries and their problems in Umueri
2. Examine the rural participatory framework approach
3. Find out the avenues of solving school libraries' problems

Literature review

Educators all over the world agree that once there is a rural school library, it will play an important and positive role in the curriculum; thereby facilitating quality education in the school. As far back as 40 years ago, school libraries have been viewed as parts of most effective ways of

renovating education by (Tokwe, 2008) because of their roles in transforming changes in children's reading abilities. Hence, girls and boys everywhere are meant to learn how to read, write, in order to bridge the gaps between the poorest and the richest children, between urban and rural school libraries.

Therefore, rural schools need libraries for students' achievement which is essential to long-term strategy for literacy, education and information provision. It is in this view that Busayo (2011) asserted that a child can know much about his environment, only, by exposing him or her to reading books, newspapers, and magazines. It is the library that can expose the child to reading and developing his love for books, with literacy development (Tella and Akande 2007). Reading children can become reading adults when there are good rural school library to enhance significant amounts of voluntary reading (International Reading Association, 2000).

Importantly, the rural community dwellers are sensitized and empowered to contribute to their own sustainability. Since government cannot provide everything for the community, indigenes can contribute in driving development to their areas, especially in information and education sectors. Using various techniques PRA has recorded successes, thus, affirming that rural people can actually know where and how to participate in helping to achieve their development (Olawepo, 2009). World Bank (2013) informed that semi-structured interview, focus group discussions, preference ranking, mapping and modeling, seasonal and historical diagramming are tools of PRA. Other tools that are widely used are direct observation, transect walk (Olawepo, 2009), need based assessment, problems and solving measures. They are all evidence-based fact finding missions that integrate observing, listening and asking questions in community development strategies.

In creating an all inclusive participatory rural approaches in library development, World Bank (2015) over the last decade, has increasingly focused on lending to community driven development (CDD) programs in order to reach local communities in the poorest regions directly to support a variety of urgent needs, including water supply and sanitation, school and health post construction. Similarly, Tokwe (2013) has intimated that international voluntary organizations such as Rural Libraries Resources Development Programme, Book Aid International, Rotary Club and Books for Africa has initiated library development in Zimbabwe through donations of books by institutions or prominent personalities teaming up to fund for construction of libraries. The rural dwellers have appreciated these efforts which made them to seek more grants from community philanthropists.

Hence, communities have continued to seek and receive resources for their school libraries through participatory rural approaches. Tokwe (2013) recounted how a construction phase and the Library Setup Committee in a school community was privileged to receive posters, promotional and informational materials from a school librarian based in the UK, as well as non-governmental organizations such as SAfAIDS and local Book Publishers. Again, is The Library Project (2015) in China that engaged many organizations like the local government charities, the local communities, the school board, teachers and students to donate libraries to urban migrant elementary schools and community centres. Global Giving (2015) has also provided children in rural Mongolia with better access to quality learning materials, age-appropriate literature and children's books. The project aimed new school libraries in poor, rural areas, reaching 2,000 - 5,000 children, with access to quality learning materials, promoting interest in reading and learning. There was also a Zimbabwean, living in Auckland, New Zealand who wanted to give

back to the rural school he attended as a child. Through him books were donated and sent from the Library and Information Association of New Zealand listserve (Zimbabwe Trust, 2015).

Methodology

This is a qualitative research. It focused on activities of existing community based monitors (CBM) of V2P project in rural community of Umueri where an NGO created spaces for the researchers to key into the community information and development. All the government primary and secondary schools in the community were physically assessed and appraised in terms of learning facilities including the school library provision with CBMs. Data were also collected from 5 community stakeholders as key informants and 12 teachers as well as discussions in community group meetings. This school monitoring started in January 2015. There were 25 CBMs made up of men, women and youths who were part of participatory rural appraisal group.

The tools in data collection were

- i. Focus Group Discussions: these helped in appreciating the focal understanding of the need to develop the rural school education sector. Series of discussions were held with different community groups in small clusters like the women, youth and the men
- ii. Key informant interviews: these were held with teachers, community leaders from the town union executives who stated the situations of the rural school learning facilities
- iii. On the site Monitoring: these were physical appraisal of rural schools and library facilities. The authors and the CBMs walked round the schools to observe and evaluate different schools in different locations both primary and secondary schools for evidence based study.

The visits to schools took 4 working days while interviews and visiting community groups stretched into four weeks because of peculiarity of traditional market day meeting. This was done to claim invited spaces from the community group meetings which were usually held once in a month. It was not difficult to be integrated into the local content, language and culture because one of the researchers is a member of the organization that carries out V2P project. The researcher is also an indigene of the local government which made the research easily amenable. A follow up strategies were mapped out for onward review and evaluation which yielded positive result as library donations were achieved.

Findings:

Table 1. Community school libraries and their conditions in Umueri

S/N	School	Location	Existing school library	Resources
	Primary schools			
1.	Ovuaku primary school	Udabor		
2.	Oche Primary school	Shell road		
3.	Central School	Otuocha Umueri		
4.	Migrant school	Ikenga		
5.	Enuobodo Central school	Umuatuolu		
6.	Unity Primary school	Mgbede		
7.	Udoka primary school	Ogbu		
8.	Igwebuike primary school	Mgbede		
9.	Bridgehead Migrant school	Nneyi		
	Secondary Schools			
10.	Girls High school	Mgbede	*	
11.	Community secondary school	Ivite	*	
12.	Technical school	Obinetiti		

The Table shows that there are nine primary and three secondary schools in Umueri community.

Two secondary schools have libraries but there is no school library in any of the primary schools

and one secondary school in Umueri community. This indicates that school library is not accorded any importance in Umueri community

Figure 1: Problem tree revealing rural schools libraries in Umueri

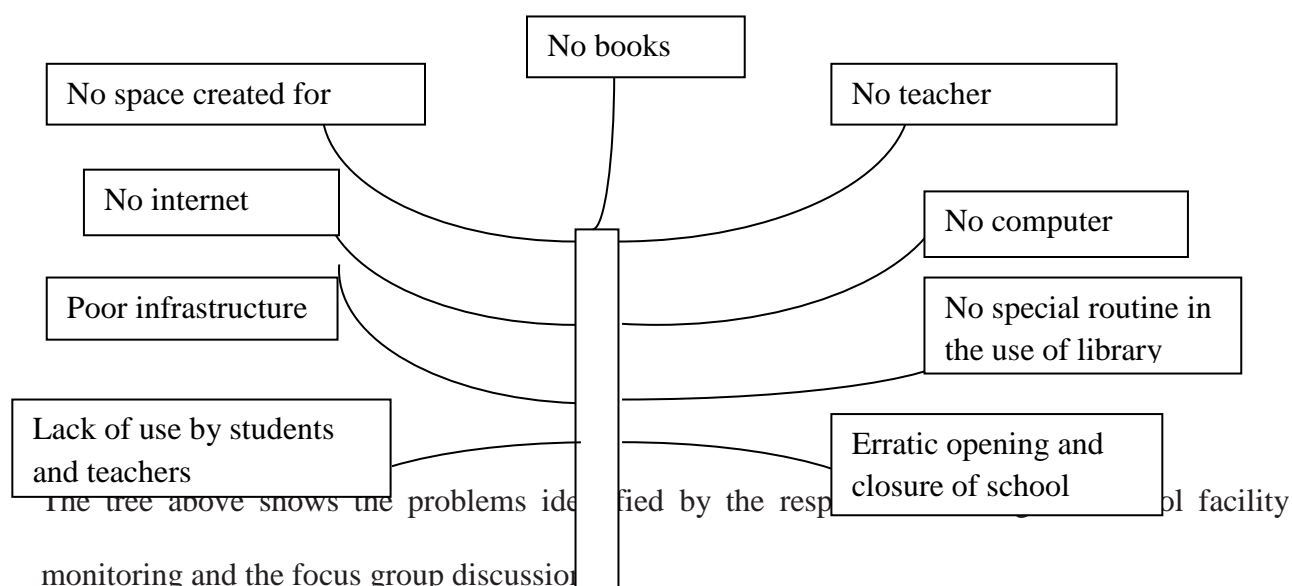


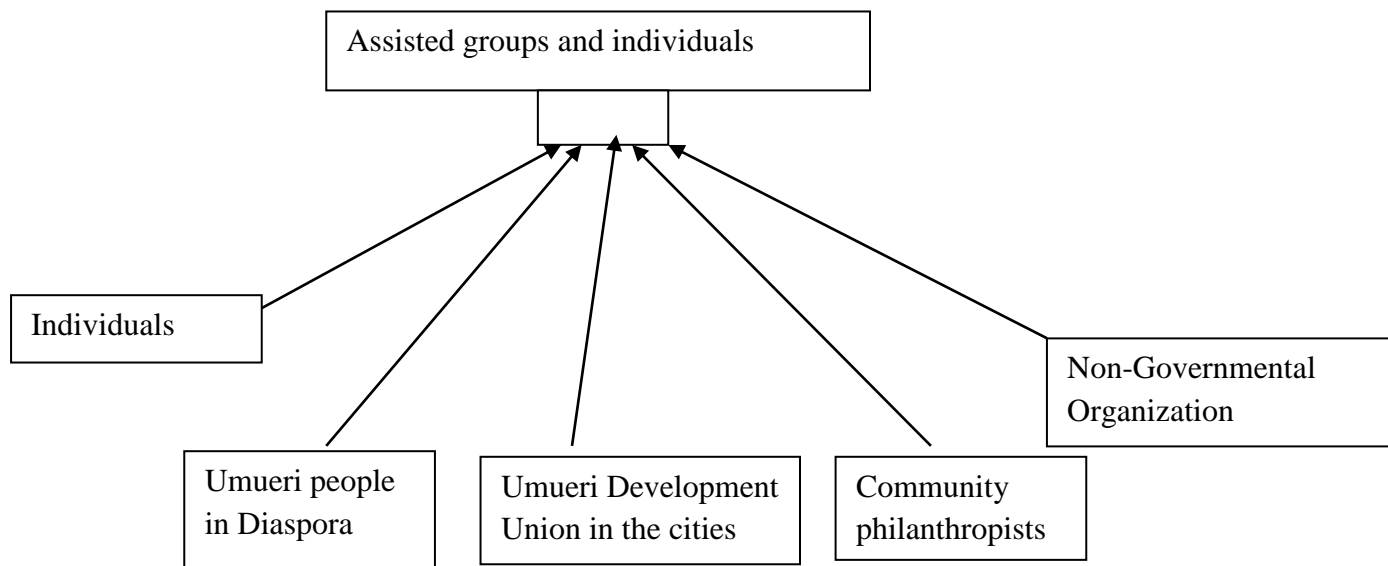
Table 2: Rural participatory framework approach

Planning activity	Appraisal activity with the participants	Strategic applications on awareness for rural school
Participatory needs analysis	Needs assessment on learning facilities	General information and in-depth analysis on local condition school libraries
	Participatory planning	Information and knowledge of community driven development Recognition of prioritized issues Identification of stakeholders and funders
Participatory volunteer resource	Resource analysis	Identification and assessment of resources Identification of community groups, individuals to meet
	Participatory resource work plan	Action plan with time lines, reporting and monitoring activities

Table 2 shows the participants efforts in analyzing the needs assessment in the rural school libraries. In the discussion, there was increase in knowledge in the essence of community driven

development. Also shown were the resources needed and action plan for development of the school libraries.

Figure 2: Find out avenues of solving school libraries' problems



In Figure 2 the breakdown of groups and individuals to be contacted for improved resources in the school libraries were shown. While greater numbers of groups and individuals are indigenes of the community, the non-governmental organizations were also added in the list. This shows wide arrays of sectors to seek development from.

Table 3: Book Gifts to schools in Umueri from Prince Odili Okoye. A graduate and business man based in Lagos.

Types of resources donated	Schools benefitted
Core subject books	9 Government primary schools (Table 1)
Picture books	3 Government secondary schools (Table 1)
Science text books	7 Private schools

Table 3 shows the schools that benefitted from the book gifts. All the government primary and secondary schools benefitted as well as the private schools in the community. No school was left behind.

Table 4: Schools that created spaces for libraries after the book gift

S/N	Name of schools	Location	Kind of space created
1.	Ovuaku Primary school	Udabor	Small space created with a shelf

As at the time of writing this paper only one school has created space for library after the book gifts were distributed.

Analysis

The presentation of rural school libraries together with the resources found therein in Table 1 revealed the level of importance attached to libraries in the rural communities. Again, the resources found in the existing school libraries are stale and unused indicating that the libraries might have been there but served little or no purpose to the children. When the locals were asked why the school libraries were so deserted, the researcher was told that the government doesn't remember them nor supervise what is going on in their communities to help them. This related with what was discovered in the rural schools visits which showed abandonment, dysfunctional and underserved rural schools whose students are denied of opportunities of exploring books, reading culture (Tokwe, 2013, Parry, 2008) and achievement of academic performance (Adeniji, 2006). At the moment, the rural school libraries in Umueri are in great need of development

The problems of the rural school libraries as identified by the local people in Figure 1 clearly marked the many challenges of learning facilities in the community. It could be attributed to

disparities between rural school libraries and those in the urban populated areas. This could also be what Information Policy and Access (2013) had in mind when it stated the great question, who cares? Thus, indicating the serious impact of loss of reading culture and literacy issues in rural communities. A participant in the focus group discussion remarked:

village These schools have always been like this. I and my siblings went to school in this
us and That library is not working. Nobody goes there. We read what the teachers taught
 that is that. Ha! School library? Nothing is there.

One of the teachers informed:

Library is good but we do not have adequate resources for these children.

Discussing the problems with the participants, it was discovered that ICT and infrastructure are great challenges because even where a supposed school library exists, there are nothing to support reading and learning facilities like spaces, computers, reading desks, chairs and enabling environment. These challenges together with the unavailability of advanced telecommunications to access information in rural schools (Simon, 2008) led to the participatory rural appraisal because the local people want their communities and children to meet up in the information society and make their lives better.

The idea that rural people can take ownership of government projects and contribute to their development led to the acknowledgement of analysis of school children learning facilities (Table 2). The discussions underlay the potentials and resources of achieving their objectives if good articulated work plan is implemented. This underscores the emphasis of World Bank (2015) and Birns, Hill and Nel, (1999) that rural people should be encouraged to be involved in identifying their

basic needs and support them to channel their own development. It shows that rural people have great potentials and can attain their own development in their own way hence buttressing development. This buttresses the statement of FAO (2015) that PRA ‘break the silence’ of the poor and disadvantaged sections, recognizing the value of popular collective knowledge and legitimate production of knowledge by the people themselves. The assumption here is that when rural dwellers are sensitized effective development can be recorded as it happened in Umueri community as shown in Figure 2.

Resultantly, the PRA discussion analysis and implementation meet the demands of the local people - Book Gifts to schools in Umueri from Prince Odili Okoye an indigenous philanthropist who lives in Lagos, Nigeria. This was presented in Table 3. This was a replica of event in Zimbabwe Rural Schools Library where a Zimbabwean, living in Auckland, New Zealand donated books and sent them from the Library and Information Association of New Zealand listserve (Zimbabwe Trust, 2015). Thus, giving back to the rural school he attended as a child. It is a good initiative which aptly indicates that rural school children can be given access to better quality learning materials (Global Giving, 2015) through donors, volunteers and voluntary organizations (Tokwe, 2013 and Library Project, 2015). This was appreciated by the teachers, students, community stakeholders and the parents. The success of this approach has led to creating of spaces for school libraries. This was shown in Table 4. Community participation and contributions are full of possibilities and can transform ideologies.

Implications for rural school library development in Nigeria

School libraries are under the education sector in Nigeria and should be provided alongside other learning facilities, even in the rural communities. Studies have shown that participation and

community driven development are necessary in achieving effective functional development. The rural community schools and children's literacy should be given priority so that succession plan of future leaders will be assured. The sensitization that attributed the contribution of indigenous people right from the planning stage to the implementation and reporting is an indication that meeting the needs of the school libraries in rural communities can be achieved.

Hence, waiting for the government to provide all the resources needed may keep a community in perpetual poverty. The children need total quality education and the arrangement under which they gain access for good learning experiences largely determines among other things, effective school libraries for enhancement of reading culture. There is need to appraise the best practice of participatory development. The approach will guaranty sustainable development and absolute ownership of projects for the benefits of the whole community.

Conclusion

School libraries are worth having to support learning and literacy activities. The success of rural school library development can come to reality if and when community participate and contribute to its growth. The case in Umueri rural community has revealed that good participatory strategies can raise reading resources for school libraries in teaching and learning process. The government should also ensure equity and adequate provision of funds as stipulated in the approved budget for education supports. The Schools in Umueri look forward to more library resources to address the needs of the students. The community people are also ready to attract more people in donating to the school education and information centers in order to

encourage a culture of reading among pupils. These children are the leaders of tomorrow. It is in everyone's best interest to help our leaders recognize their potentials as early as possible through functional library and literacy activities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study:

- Every community should be encouraged to contribute to library development for the children's literacy and the general community members
- There is need to visit local school libraries and leverage on the importance of library for children's academic performance
- Parents and teachers should be encouraged to introduce books and enhance reading culture in children, especially in school activities
- The board in charge of education and literacy should include library development and supervision in their itinerary. If the fund for the school library is given out, it must be ensured that it reaches every school both in urban and rural communities.
- Public library and the library association should integrate rural school libraries into its program in order to create empowerment and collaborate with schools in providing resources and reading activities for children's reading habits
- Everyone can get involved, advocate for children and support gifts for children's reading facilities

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