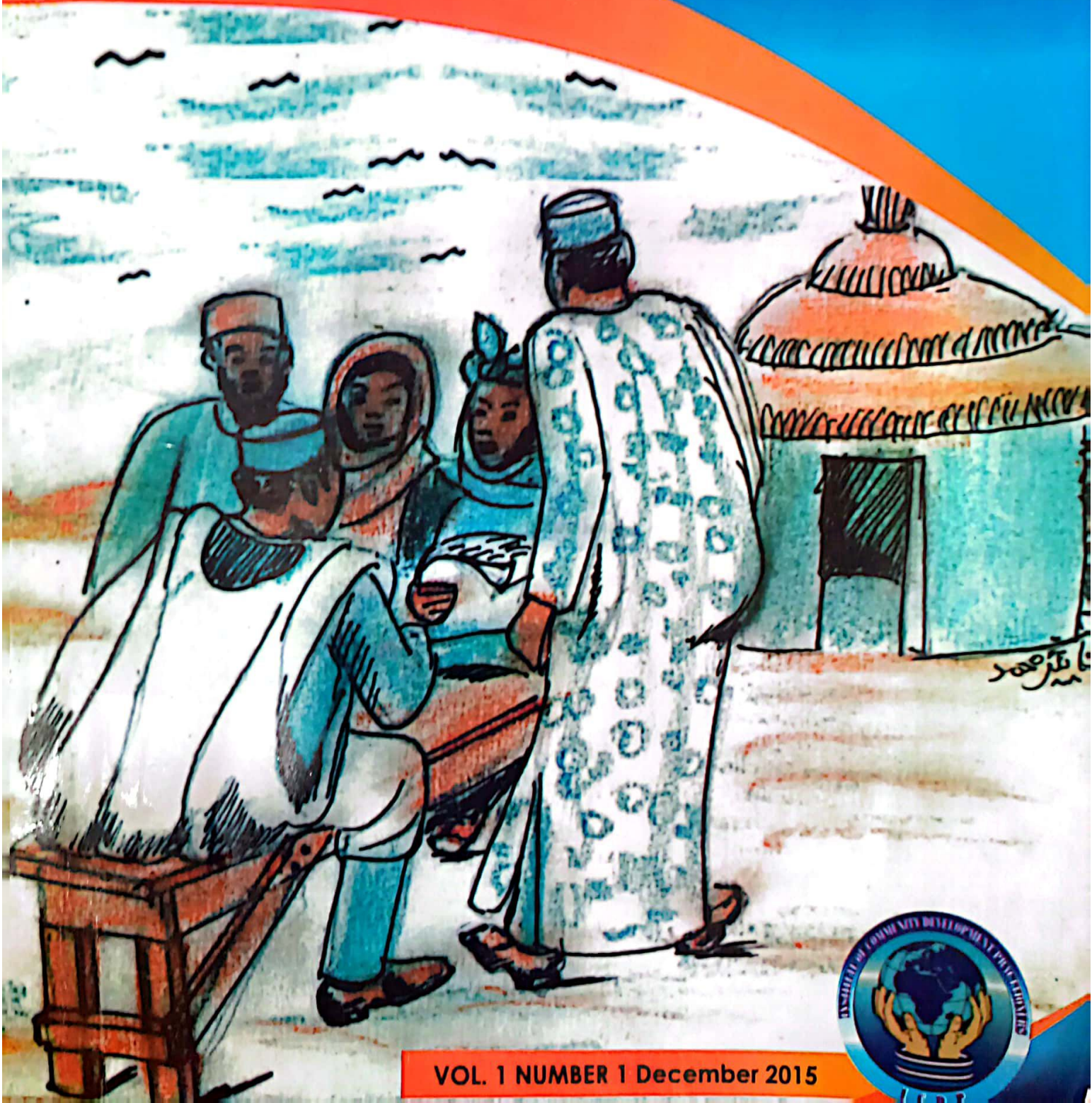


NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT (NJCLAD)

A MULTI DISCIPLINARY FORUM OF
THE INSTITUTE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS, NIGERIA



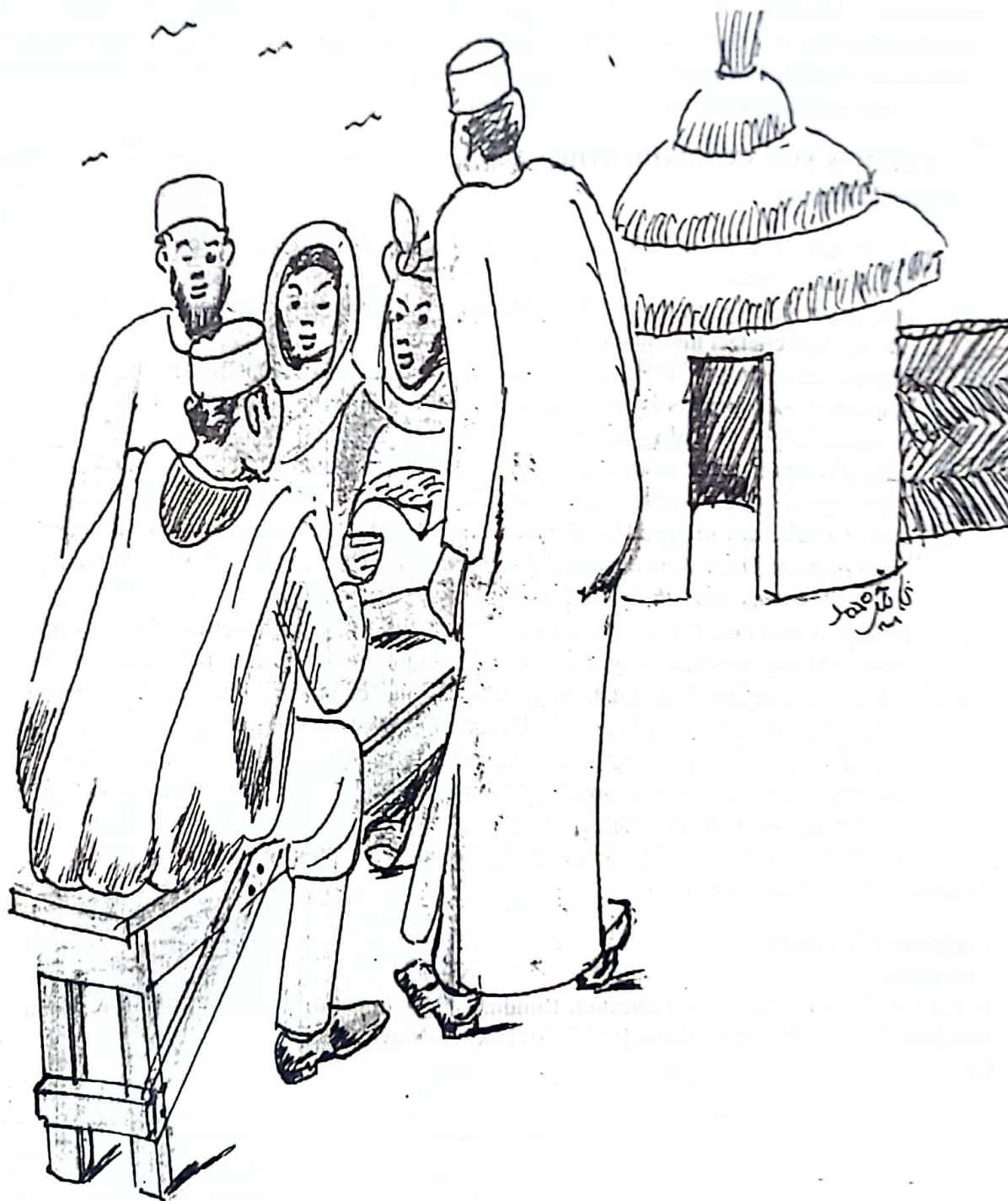
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ABOUT THE JOURNAL

NJCLAD is an annual journal published by the Institute of Community Development Practitioners, Nigeria. It is a multidisciplinary forum which seeks to promote productive scholarship and contribute to effective practice of community development in Nigeria. The journal shall ensure that innovative practices in Community Development studies in the Nigerian context are promoted. The broad focus of the journal is on theory, research, policy and practice in Community Development. It is intended for both professional Community development practitioners, volunteers and academics.

The journal welcomes articles on any of the following subject areas: Community/Rural Development, Extension Education/services, Community service learning, Social work and Welfare Education, Literacy Studies, Community Psychology, Non-Formal Education, Social Entrepreneurship, Youth work, Innovations Diffusion, Cooperative Studies, Financial Literacy, Community Health, Environmental sustainability, public service, Public-Private Partnerships and other related topics presented in a community learning and development context.

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- ix. Authors must provide brief notes on themselves and due acknowledgement of grants and support etc (where applicable).
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IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRE ON MASS LITERACY AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF KWARA STATE

BY

SHOLAGBERU, Abdulsalam Oladimeji

Abstract

The paper examines the concepts of community information centre and its relevance on mass literacy and community development in Nigeria with specific reference to Kwara State. Community Information Centre provide arrays of services which was found useful and interesting towards the community development plan. such plan helps to build a citizenry of self reliant, improve well being and enhance the diversity of the cultural landscape. The papers centered on the concept of mass literacy, concept of community development, the relationship between community information centre and mass literacy and the importance of community information centre and mass literacy on community development. It is however concluded that, information is a useful educational indices which help individual develop his or her potential towards the upliftment of the society where he or she belongs and the major recommendations from improvement were provided along the conclusions, that state and national government should be persuaded to invest on mass literacy programme through an educative community information centre. Also funding of mass literacy agency for community to benefit from.

Introduction

Access to information is important. People need information to develop their potential through education and training, to succeed in business, to enrich their cultural experience, and to take control of their daily lives. Information is a key contributor to the development of individuals and communities.

Over the last 30 or 40 years, a large number of initiatives and projects have been launched in an attempt to overcome the problem of unequal access to information. The specific aim of this study was to provide an analytical comparison of the different types of community centres, telecentres and multimedia centres, and to distil the lessons that can be learned from them.

To build a society that is self-sufficient requires the mobilization of the uneducated, the poor and underdeveloped, many of whom have untapped potentials; and if they are fully developed will be of immense benefit not only to themselves but to the nation as a whole. On this premise the British and French governments promoted mass education in their colonies; their

primary objective was to give the masses opportunity to participate in the conduct of their own affairs. The ultimate aim was to develop, among the masses, enlightened public opinion, to ensure, particularly civic education and the development of reasoned opinions on matters of local and national government rather than the parroting of a few people, or a lethargic acceptance of the status quo (Omolewa, 2007). Similarly, one is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainments in reading, writing and arithmetic make it possible for him to continue to use these skills towards his own and the community's development. The concept of literacy should be understood as the ability to read, write and compute in any language and to an appreciable level. However, other by-concepts are functional literacy, illiteracy and semi-illiteracy. Functional literacy, according to Oduaran (1999), refers aptly to the ability to use the skill of reading, writing and computing in the acquisition of such information as would make the individual function more actively and beneficially in the economic, social, political and cultural activities of the community where he lives. Hence the ability of the individual to contribute to the development of the country lies in his ability to read and write. There cannot be meaningful development in a modern society where majority of the populace is illiterate. The implication therefore, is the scaling up of literacy programmes to be part of major national endeavor, even if it finds practical expression in a diversity of programme activities. The report of Human Development rates Nigeria as having the highest number of illiterates in the world. In agreement, The United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), discloses that, "there are about 60 million adults in Nigeria, 85% of them under the age of 35 years, who can neither read nor write" (EFA, 2000). Despite the importance of education, to improve standard of living, Nigeria has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, world map (2011).

The low level literacy partly accounts for the low level of development in Nigeria. Thus, a nation which undermines the contributions of the some of her citizens makes slow progress towards national development. The realization of organizational objectives depends largely on the quantity and quality of personnel (manpower) available in the organization and the degree of effectiveness in the utilization of available manpower. Commenting on this point, Imhabekhai (1998) advocates that it is imperative that Information Communication Centre of any organization makes sufficient efforts in procuring and developing the needed manpower

resources and pay attention to how well they are utilized. However, experience has shown that in most public agencies, greater interest is shown in the areas of manpower development and procurement or recruitment than in how effectively utilized are the available manpower resources.

Concept of Community Development

Community development combines the idea of "community" with "development". We discussed earlier the concept of community – a group of people with a shared identity. Hence, community development relies on interaction between people and joint action, rather than individual activity – what some sociologists call "collective agency" (Flora and Flora, 2003). "Development" is a process that increases choices. It means new options, diversification, thinking about apparent issues differently and anticipating change (Christenson 2009). Development involves change, improvement and vitality – a directed attempt to improve participation, flexibility, equity, attitudes, the function of institutions and the quality of life. It is the creation of wealth – wealth meaning the things people value, not just dollars (Shaffer, 2009). It leads to a net addition to community assets, avoiding the "zero sum" situation where a job created "here", is a job lost "there".

Putting the two terms together – community development – means that a community itself engages in a process aimed at improving the social, economic and environmental situation of the community. The community is both the means and the end of community development. The community itself takes action and participates together. It is through this action that the community becomes more vital, not just economically but as a strong functioning community in itself.

Concept of Mass Literacy and Adult Education

Adult is a person who is physically and psychologically mature and is socially, economically and politically responsible. Physically, maturity implies that the adult is capable of being a parent, picking a life partner, raising a family and managing a home. The National Policy in Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, FRN 2004) lists seven components of adult and non formal education. These are functional literacy, remedial continuing, vocational, aesthetic, cultural and civic education for youths and adults outside the formal school system. At the same time the FRN (2004) outlines goals of mass literacy, adult and non-formal Ozoemena education as that which shall be to:

- i) Provide functional literacy and continuing education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who did not complete their primary education. These include the nomads, migrant families, the disabled and other categories or groups, especially the disadvantaged gender.
- ii) Provide functional and remedial education for those young people who did not education.
- iii) Provide education for different categories of completers of the formal education system in order to improve their basic knowledge and skills.
- iv) Provide in-service on the job, vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills, and
- v) Give the adult citizens of the country necessary aesthetic, cultural and civic education for public enlightenment.

Programmes are therefore designed and structured to meet the needs of adults and persons that did not acquire enough formal education, or none at all, as well as those that need to sustain learning for self-employment. It could be seen that adult education is neither just for persons who are desirous to read, write and communicate particularly in English nor for people who are advanced in age, it is a programme designed and aimed at adult persons and those who could not for one reason complete their education in a formal setting when they were young. The ultimate beneficiaries will be mainly young girls and women, youth and out-of-school children, and vulnerable populations and groups who have suffered from decades of prejudice, marginalization, discrimination and even exclusion, particularly in urban slums and rural areas.

Adult education now involves the study of various disciplines such as economics, agriculture, history, hygiene, arts and crafts, in these ways; the adult population is involved in planning programmes so that they can gain practical skills for individual improvement and societal development.

Community Development and Mass Literacy

A common definition of *community development* is not simple to attain, nor is it universally agreed upon. Part of the confusion rests with the fact that *community development* is both process and product. The practice of community development is not one focused solely on material resource development, nor is it devoted exclusively to systems for addressing community needs. Jones and Silva (2001) consider an integrated model of community development that includes problem solving, community building, and systems interaction. Stated

another way, they posit that a truly integrated approach assesses the problem, goes on to build community capacity, and importantly, addresses the problem.

Community refers to the focus of the interest at question. In fact, community of interest is a useful characterization of the term. It implies more than merely a physical place, although it can, and often does include a geographic element. It may, however, reference a discrete collection of persons about which a common interest is shared, yet they may be collected from far different places, not necessarily even corresponding about their shared interest. The community of interest need not be made up of similar perspectives. Indeed, it often is made up of diverse perspectives surrounding a common issue.

Basic literacy which is considered as a fundamental human right in the modern world is an obligation of every illiterate adult to acquire knowledge. UNESCO, (2005). While Nzeneri, (2002), views basic literacy as a fundamental right has not only been philosophically accepted by the modern world for the welfare of the individual but also as a community need for its economic, social and cultural development. Nzeneri, (2002) maintained, that generally, education aimed at the acquisition of primary knowledge and skills necessary for life in a society can be termed as "basic literacy". These skills may include literacy and numeracy, of social and life skills, of understanding community life necessary for responsible participation in the society. As significant as literacy is termed as fundamental human right, it is unfortunate that, Kwara state has not attained 100 percent literacy rate. While the national literacy rate is put at percent, that of Kwara state is less than 29.9% percent (Khalid, 2004). The situation might not have changed much in recent time. In view of the importance of literacy to development, the Kwara state government joined the fight against illiteracy by establishing Agency for Mass Literacy on the 22nd September, 1987 via Edict No 10 of 1987. The Edict provided legal framework for the agency for mass literacy include:

- (i) Substantially reduction, or eradication of illiteracy in Kwara state.
- (ii) Provision of functional education to enable the rural people to use newly acquired literacy skills.
- (iii) Enabling of the people to relate newly acquired literacy to their civic, political and cultural activities
- (iv) Development of desirable attitudes to work and inculcation of good social habits, conducive to good living through cooperative, civic, and community health education

(v) Improvement of the quality of life of rural dwellers.

In line with the vision, the Kwara state through the Agency for mass literacy has established many literacy centres across the state. For instance, the established centres are as follows: 2005; 108 literacy centres; 2006, 1,016 centres, 2007, 1,158 literacy centres and year 2008; 1,405 literacy centres. With yearly increase in the number of literacy centres and the expansion in the enrolment from 25,513 to 29,522 in the year 2008, the number of instructors has also increased greatly, from 684 in 2005 to 1,050 in 2008. In spite of the increase in literacy centres and enrolment, the programme witness challenges with sudden decrease of established literacy centres to 1008 in the year 2011, with these decrease the enrolment of learners dropped to 1600 in the same year. The number of instructors has also decrease greatly from 800 to 600 throughout the state. (Kwara State Agency for Mass Literacy Manual, 2008).

The expansion and subsequent decrease at the literacy programme seems to call for effective management, if the programme is to succeed. Managers/administrators become important in order to ensure quality control through regular and continual supervision of instructional and other education services. Consequently, the pursuit of educational excellence has been one of the major goals of Kwara state Agency for Mass Literacy. This is because adult education has been adjudged the key with which any nation could permanently close the doors of poverty and ignorance and, at the same time, open that of prosperity in terms of economic buoyancy, social advancement and civilization, (Oluborode, 2007). To this end, literacy programmes are considered instrument of change.

Traditionally one could say, the Kwara state Agency for Mass Literacy has its priority position in the eradication of illiteracy and manpower development. According to Omolewa (2007) "the success of most organizations is the Information Communication Centre group", manager, executives and administrators are responsible for the most important decisions made within the organizations. It is Information Communication Centre team that defines the goals of the organization; essentially reflected in a budget or plan and present it to the public with which it interacts. These kinds of functions put the Information Communication Centre in forms of models of Information Communication Centre strategies. Omolewa (2007), the difference between strategic and operational management, within an organization was not new. What was new, was the emphasis on strategic Information Communication Centre in any organization as a means of ensuring the continuous success in the growth of such an organization.

Importance of Community Information Centre on Mass Literacy and Community Development

The Kwara State Agency for Mass Literacy Policy handbook (2006), stressed that Information Communication Centre policies of basic literacy programmes have impacted positively on all structures involved in the Education For All (EFA) process: the state, local governments, civil society, community organizations and town unions all of which now contribute towards the development of facilities for basic literacy and literacy programme in the state. Both the state and local governments share the responsibilities of sourcing and managing funds for payment of instructors' salaries and renovations of the literacy centres. The Kwara State Agency for Mass Literacy through its department of social mobilization and community development orientate the stakeholders, on their duties, obligations and responsibilities as wards, custodians, implementers and facilitators of basic literacy programme in their locality.

A special programme was designed for empowering local communities through supervised 'self help project'. This aspect of contributions of achieving Education for All (EFA) goals enjoys donor interventions, in terms of support to community participation consequent upon the new perspectives: communities now regard provision of land facilities such as classroom blocks and furniture as part of their responsibilities towards the education of their people. In the rural areas, chiefs and traditional rulers now join in the effort to identify and secure accommodation for instructors, especially those deployed to their areas, (MLH, 2006). The commitment of opinion leaders in the state to basic literacy programme has also led to recruitment of instructors, as a reaction to shortfall in availability of instructors. The instructors are appointed and paid by the leaders in their respective locality.

The Importance of Community Development in Preserving Social Capital

Community development can be defined as the process whereby different people, from different backgrounds, with different and aligned interests come together to resolve issues in a collaborative manner. It can be used to build self-reliant communities, increased ownership of facilities and civic spaces, improve wellbeing and enhance the diversity of the cultural landscape. Some commonly cited community development outcomes include:

- People participating in social activities to overcome social isolation
- Individuals developing self-esteem, confidence and assertiveness
- Mutual support

- . Increased participation in political and citizenship activities
- . Practical outcomes (e.g. a changed bus route)
- . Additional funding for new services in areas of priority need

Less commonly recognised benefits include:

- . An improved competitive/comparative advantage as a community of choice
- . More private sector investment
- . Increased safety and security
- . More effective institutional structures
- . Heightened community satisfaction
- . Improved local government image and effectiveness

Contemporary thinking would suggest that a key priority for local government post amalgamation should be on building and maintaining 'social capital' through facilitation of community development outcomes.

Coined by Coleman (2009), social capital is about the extent, breadth and effectiveness of relationships that combined constitute resources for action. The concept was popularized by Robert (2013) who tied social capital to economic development, arguing that industries which share knowledge and co-operate to deliver mutually beneficial outcomes, are more profitable. Oluborode (2007) adds that social capital lowers the transaction costs of doing business, and that in such environments people are more likely to be innovative, creative and take risks.

At a local government level, social capital improves community confidence, heightens community participation rates, enhances wellbeing, reduces crime and improves economic prosperity (Knack, 2002). Social capital then is also tied to the identity of a locality and its associated sense of place (Jones & Silva, 2001). Like physical infrastructure, if not maintained, social capital depreciates over time.

There are a number of 'hard' and 'soft' social infrastructure tools than can be used to build and maintain social capital and include:

- . Creating accessible and activated hubs of activity for social interaction
- . Fostering the formation of viable community groups and sporting organisations
- . Organising events and activities that bring people together
- . Consulting and engaging with the community to ensure people have a say in the way localities evolve

Delivering services to cater for the disadvantaged

Information collection and analysis to determine need

Offering material and process support to help groups help themselves

Delivering education and training to enable people to be aspirational

Developing and maintaining appropriate community infrastructure

Where there is a high degree of social capital there is more trust amongst people and they are more likely to step outside the norm to find solutions to community issues. Moreover it is the strength and sense of empowerment that enables communities to act on their own behalf to address issues, rather than wait and expect and complain until someone acts for them. Social capital then, is an effective measure of the success of community development initiatives. It should guide the focus of the local government's and community's endeavours to build social networks and physical places for people to prosper. It should also be tied to the way the local government prioritizes and meets community expectations.

Future Focus Areas

Based on a combination of community development best practice, four future focus areas for attention post amalgamation have been identified. These are;

1. Social Wellbeing
2. Community and Stakeholder Engagement
3. Place Activation
4. Relationship Building and Social Networks

The following sections provide a more detailed outline of the types of activities within each of these focus areas. It should be recognized that they cannot be considered in isolation. Rather they are inter-related and inter-dependent.

Social Wellbeing

Social wellbeing is a multi-faceted indicator of the community's health, quality of life, and access to the facilities and services required to maintain a high degree of social capital. Related programs aim to increase physical activity, enhance education, improve emergency management, community safety and access to essential health services, and cater for special needs groups. Also included are social initiatives such as aged care, youth, environmental awareness, community engagement, volunteerism and cultural development.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging the community in decision-making builds trust and affords legitimacy and credibility to outcomes. It leads to partnerships between residents and policy makers through a shared sense of ownership of the issues, raises the quality of policies, and enhances the potential for successful implementation.

For the consultation process to be effective, it requires access to objective, reliable and relevant information; clear goals; time, resources and flexibility for active participation; and a commitment from the local government.

Place Activation

An important, but often neglected, aspect of community development is the activation of civic, public and commercial precincts. The most common approach in new land developments is to wait until there is a large population before releasing or constructing town centre infrastructure. The approach advocated for the local government is oriented around key stakeholders working together in a pro-active manner to create vibrancy in civic spaces as early as practically possible. This would include events, business incubation, attracting private sector investment and developing new clubs and organisations to maximise the benefits of public sector expenditure on social infrastructure.

Partnerships and Relationship Building

The nature of the focus areas outlined above, highlight that to cater for the aspirations of the existing and future communities, the local government needs to continue to adapt to changing circumstances. It can not, nor should it, attempt to meet these needs alone. Rather it will need to develop, foster and successfully implement mutually beneficial partnership arrangements with the community, private sector, not-for-profit organizations and other government agencies.

These partnerships will be a combination of formal agreements and informal relationships. To succeed they should adhere to the following core partnership principles:

These partnerships will be a combination of formal agreements and informal relationships. To succeed they should adhere to the following core partnership principles:

Summary

Community information and technology centres continue to be established in response to needs within the communities that they serve. They share an underlying purpose, which is to achieve equality of access to information; or, at least, to reduce levels of inequality. The nature

and scope of the centres has changed over time as they have responded to changing needs and to changes in the technology of information.

The centres that work most effectively are those where there is a union of three things: charismatic leadership, strong support from the community and adequate finance, which is usually provided from outside the community. The centres are, however, fragile. Few last for more than ten years. Nonetheless, when they are operating effectively, the centres make a valued contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the communities that they serve. The value of that contribution will undoubtedly increase as the transition to information-based societies becomes more entrenched. The challenge for the future is to persuade local, regional and national government bodies to accept responsibility for funding these services long term. They have to recognise that providing communities with an acceptable level of access to information and ICT is as important as providing them with access to schools, clinics, the road network and the transport system. Certainly, they have to back that recognition with a commitment to fund the services.

Conclusion/Implications

Education is important and useful to man, because it is fundamental to the construction of a knowledge, economy, and society of a nation, it is a way of economic wealth and social upliftment. It is further universally accepted that education enriches individual's knowledge and develop his potential and prepare one to face the challenges of the ever changing world. These can only be meaningful when the education system, is an efficient and effectively managed. The manager/administrator is seen as an initiator or changes that is urgently needed in the development process, and is expected to demonstrate dynamic leadership skills that will carry his subordinates along the path of development.

By implication, there is no human endeavour that does not require proper Information Communication Management for its proper functioning. Community information centre has played a very significant role in basic literacy programme in Kwara state. The effect of Information Communication Centre to mass literacy programme on Kwara state people are; Community Information awareness, information management and individual upliftment. The centre over the years, has created an awareness of the environment and the indigenization of educational programmes in the field of adult education.

Information Communication Centre creates in adult educators and adult learners, sound awareness for the promotion of basic literacy programme in their immediate community/environments. Information Communication Centre has helped to upgrade the standard of living of adult because it equips them with basic innovative experiences to improve on their managerial ability over their lives as well as aid the promotion of the societal aspiration for functional living.

Recommendations and Actions

The main recommendation of this report is that development agencies should begin the process of convincing national and local governments that funding effective community-based information and technology centres is as important as providing other essential infrastructure and services. As a first step in this process, a study should be undertaken to establish the true capital and running costs for a range of different centres, as well as to assess the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of the centres on the communities that they serve.

Once this evidence has been collected, national governments should be persuaded that they have a responsibility to provide long-term funding for centres and agencies to provide access to information that will benefit the community, and access to technology to acquire, process, store and disseminate this information.

Government agencies as well as NGOs should ensure continuity of literacy programmes by according non-formal education the recognition that is accorded formal schooling, so that the six objectives of the 'Education for All' adopted in Dakar (2000) may not become a mirage.

The continual reliance on self-reporting enumeration of literate citizens without a realistic literacy assessment survey will not augur well for the country's development as it will be difficult to know the actual number of people that are literate, their level of literacy and what language they are able to read and write.

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