

**INFORMATION ACCESS FOR ENGAGEMENT IN COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE AMONG RURAL FEMALE
ENTREPRENEURS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.**

Princess Letombari NWINEH, Ph.D,
nwineh.princess @ust.edu.ng

Ndubuisi OGUZO

Barine Lesi ONOJA, Ph.D

&

Bariere THOMAS, Ph.D

Department of Business Education
Faculty of Education, Rivers State University

Abstract

Engagement in community development activities and improvement in business performance among rural women in Rivers state was observed to be poor. Access to information was presumed to be a factor, thus was probed, Three research questions guided the study. 1860 registered rural female entrepreneurs formed the population. A sample size of 333 women were drawn using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a 31-item self-structured questionnaire titled “Information Access for Community Engagement and Business Performance Questionnaire” (IACEBPQ) and it was split in three sections. The first section was structured in the form of a checklist while the second and third sections were structured on a four point rating scale. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined through Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient method for measuring internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. Copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved by the researchers immediately. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to answer Research Questions. Findings revealed that rural women in Rivers State accessed information for Business Performance and community engagement from daily interactions with fellow traders, town criers and phone calls while social media and internet were not viable sources of information for rural women. It was recommended among others that Government agencies, community leaders and other benefactors should explore viable information routes of rural female entrepreneurs for improved business performance and engagement in community development programe.

Keywords: Information Access, Business Performance, Community Engagement.

Introduction

Female entrepreneurs play critical roles in family stability and community development. In the face of unemployment and tough economic circumstances, female entrepreneurs spread themselves on the business stage, sourcing a living for their

families and creating jobs for themselves and others. In so doing, they stimulate the economy and develop communities. Playing these crucial roles have not yielded commensurate progress reflecting in business expansions, significant wealth creation and engagement in community development activities among women. Despite the various programmes of the Nigerian Government intended to alleviate poverty and give rural women a voice in decision making, women still seem to be poor and voiceless in community development. These programmes ranged from Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure to Better life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Family Support, National Poverty Eradication Program, SURE P etc. Poverty and minimal involvement in community development among rural women have been a subject of keen interest among researchers. Adim, Adubasim, Tamunomiebi and Akintokunbo (2018) found that female entrepreneurs in Rivers State performed poorly in business and were less involved in community development activities because they operated under unfavorable conditions stretching from infrastructural deficiencies to lack of finance. These findings suggest that poor social amenities and lack of funds were reasons for slow progress among women. Viewing from a different lens, Ewoh (2014) opined that rural women in Rivers State lacked knowledge, skill and expertise necessary for successful business and engagement in community development activities. Implying that women could be availed of social amenities, provided with funds and favorable policies, yet, they still perform poorly in business and stay voiceless in community development matters, if they lack skill and knowledge

required for business success. Skill requirement for business success are managerial, accounting, social, marketing, employability and office skills, but key among them, which also seem to be the least considered, is the ability to access information. Bunyasi, Bwisa and Namusonge (2014) revealed that poor access to business information was the major reason for business failure among rural women in Kenya.

Access to information has been viewed by researchers as a basic step for success in all life endeavors, be it career, business or academics. Zenita, Sari. Anugera and Said (2015) revealed that simply being exposed to information was a stride for success. It could be inferred that being able to access information separates an individual from ignorance and sets him or her, at least above contemporaries for success. Opoku (2015) opined that success in business depends largely on how well informed the operators are and how well, the information is managed. However, for business to respond to demands and opportunities, there is need for access to the right information. Business opportunities and demands unfold sometimes unexpected, it behooves the rural female entrepreneur to be able to access the right type of information in order not to miss business opportunities and demands to competitors and rivals. Kristensen, Martensen, and Grønholdt in Nwineh (2020) postulated that timely access to business information provides forward-looking details and facts, as well as early warning which makes it possible to carry out the necessary adjustments in business processes before they turn into unwanted business results. Access to information helps to avert business tragedies, enhances sales and profit growth, as well as customers' satisfaction and retention, which are Business Performance

indicators.

Apart from yielding fruits that indicate positive business performance, access to quality and timely information could enhance women's contributions and engagement in community development. Engagement of women in community development have been interpreted in various ways. While some authors see it as giving women, business and living incentive, others see it as involving them in problem identification and decision making in community issues. Akpomuvie (2010) explained that giving incentives to women could be a way to involve them in community development, but it is not sufficient. Akpomuvie further averred that benefactors who impose incentives may not be yielding sustained developments like those who involve their beneficiaries in identification, planning execution and management of development projects. From the forgoing, rural women who access information sufficiently, would be meaningfully engaged in community development activities, like identifying felt needs in the community, exploring possible solutions and deciding on appropriate steps. Udoh (2012) revealed that engagement of people, rural women inclusive, was not only an important element to community development but also a sure way to eliminate barriers to development. Taking into cognizance the author's view, providing social incentives was not sufficient engagement in development, rather active participation in community projects were better forms of engagement. Viewing from similar lens, Basse, Udensi, Daasi and Igbara (2013) opined that women engagement involved active participation and shared responsibility in problem analysis,

solution identification, and provision of resources on community issues. Thus, for women to actively play these roles, they need access to information for critical and creative reflection. Naik and Padmini (2014) revealed that access to information develops critical reflection that births creativity and innovativeness. It is imperative to ascertain the various means through which rural women access information and the extent to which these sources enhance business performance and involvement in community development. While Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) listed family and friends, television/radio, village drums town criers and whistling, internet and library as sources of information for female entrepreneurs, Gah Nugroho and Arif (2020) averred that social media and role models were basic sources of information that women could access for improved business performance and community development such as community assessments, consultations, and benefit sharing. Rural women in Rivers State should access information from town criers, community leaders, mentors, contemporaries, radio, television and social media, to expand their understanding of community projects and enable them identify concerns, risks, options, opportunities and potentials associated with community issues and projects. Information from these sources should also result in improved sales, profit and customers' satisfaction. However, the various means through which rural women in Rivers State access information for improved business performance and engagement in Community development have not been sufficiently dealt with, thus the need for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Rural female entrepreneurs are not scarce, from around the neighborhood to the large markets, businesses owned and run by women are available, but they have been identified with business stagnancy 202 failures. Despite their constant visible business activities, many rural women still wallow in poverty and endless need for intervention. This is an indication that they are not making commensurate progress in business with efforts and experience.

Apart from the business failures, rural female entrepreneurs have been observed to engage very slightly in community development activities; they basically get involved in community projects by receiving stipends. Community concerns, problem identification and community decisions have received very little inputs from rural women. Considering the salient roles female entrepreneurs play in the society, successive governments in Nigeria have funded rural female entrepreneurs through several programmes like Better life for rural women, Family support programme, SURE P. yet, rural female entrepreneurs seem not to make significant improvement in business, nor gain a say in community matters. Thus suggesting that money alone may not be the reason for the identified flaws, information could also be a factor.

Hence, the need to identify the various information channels of rural female entrepreneurs and the extent to which these channels influence business performance and community engagement among rural women

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to find out, the various sources through which rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State access information and the extent to which these information sources enhance their business

performance and participation in community development. The study addressed three specific following objectives:

1. The various means through which rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State access information
2. The extent to which available information sources enhance business performance among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State.
3. The extent to which available information sources enhance engagement in community development activities among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the various sources through which rural women in Rivers State access information?
2. To what extent does available information sources enhance business performance among rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does available information sources enhance engagement in community development activities among rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State?

Methodology

The design of the study was a descriptive survey research. The study was carried out in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised (1860 = 93 groups of 20 rural women) registered in clusters of 20 women with the Rivers State Ministry of Women affairs as at December 2021. The sample size of the study was 333 women selected

through stratified random sampling method. The instrument for the study was a 31-item questionnaire titled “Access to information for Business Performance and community engagement Questionnaire” (AIBPCE) divided into three parts; the first part was structured like a check list with Yes and No answer options, it elicited answers on information sources of rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State. While responses from the second and third parts were structured on the 4-point rating scale of 4, Very High Extent (VHE), 3, High Extent (HE), 2, Moderate Extent (ME), 1, Low Extent (LE), with cut of mean of 2.50 as decision point. The second and third parts were expected to provide information on extent to which available information sources enhance business performance and community participation respectively. The instrument was faced validated by three experts, (one expert each from the fields of Business education, Educational foundations

and Measurement and evaluation), all in Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was determined through Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient method for measuring of internal consistency of the instrument. A total of 20 respondents who were not part of the sample were used in testing the reliability of this study. The reliability coefficient of 0.83 was obtained. Copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved by the researchers immediately. Percentages was used to answer research question one while mean and standard deviation were used as statistical tools for data analysis to answer the research questions two and three.

Results

1. **Research Question 1:** What are the various sources through which rural women in Rivers State access information?

Table 1: Percentage rating of responses on sources through which rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State access information

S/N	I access information through the following sources	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Town Criers	310 (93)	23 (7)
2	My fellow traders	333 (100)	0 (0)
3	Television	83 (25)	250(75)
4	Radio	83 (25)	250 (75)
5	My personal Records	283 (85)	50 (15)
6	Role Models/Mentors	200 (60)	133 (40)
7	Social Media	33 (10)	300(90)
8	Internet	33 (10)	300 (90)
9	Text Messages	43 (13)	290 (87)
10	Phone Calls	300 (90)	33(10)

(Field data, 2023)

The results in Table 1 reveals that rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State

access information from town criers, fellow traders and phone calls basically, S/N 1 and 2 reflects that 93 % of respondents had town criers as source of information while S/N 2, all respondents had their fellow traders as major sources of information. As evident in S/N 10, 90% respondents agreed that phone call was a major source of information. The table further disclosed that personal records and mentors were viable sources of information among rural women in Rivers State. 85% of the respondents accessed information from their personal

records while 60% had mentors and role models from which they sourced information. Still from the table, 25% of respondents accepted that information from radio and television were available to them as evident in S/N 3 and 4. Only 10% of respondents accessed information on social media and internet while 13% were informed through text messages.

Research Question 2: To what extent does available information sources enhance business performance among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean rating on the extent available information sources enhance business performance

S/N	Statement	VHE	HE	ME	LE	N	M	S.D	RMK
1	Information from village town crier helps my market yield more gains	5	20	100	208	333	1.47	0.68	LE
2	I also get information from my fellow farmers and traders to boost my yields	108	200	15	10	333	3.22	0.67	HE
3	I have a way of keeping records that makes me reduce business wastage	180	100	31	22	333	3.31	0.90	HE
4	Collecting information from my record is easy and it increases my sales	108	200	15	10	333	3.22	0.69	HE
5	I get information from radio and television that support my farm and markets	30	50	200	53	333	2.17	0.80	LE
6	I choose good business moves because I have information from internet	50	30	140	113	333	2.05	1.02	LE
7	I have more customers because I have access to social media	13	20	200	100	333	1.84	0.70	LE
8	I get information from phone calls that support my business gains	154	82	60	37	333	3.06	1.06	HE
9	Messages from my role models have helped me reduce waste in business	108	200	15	10	333	3.22	0.67	HE

10	Text messages I get help me satisfy my customers	30	50	200	53	333	2.17	0.80	LE
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(Field data, 2023)

The results in Table 2 reveals that information from town criers did not enhance gains as indicated in S/N 1, rather personal records and fellow traders were sources of information that brought about increase in sales, boost in farm yields and reduction in wastes. This was manifest in S/N 2 to 4. Rural women in Rivers State do not access information for improved business performance through radio, television, social media and text messages. This was indicated in S/N 5.6.7. and 10.

Information from role models and phone calls enhanced profit and curbed wastages as seen in S/N 8 and 9 with mean ratings of 3.06 and 3.22 respectively.

Research Question 3: To what extent does available information sources enhance engagement in community development activities among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean Rating on the extent to which available information sources enhance engagement in community development activities

S/N	Statement	VH E	H E	ME	L E	N	M	S. D	RM K
1	Information from village town crier helps me identify community problems	5	20	100	20	33	1.4	0.6	LE
2	I also get information from my fellow farmers and traders that helps explore options to solve community problems	108	200	15	10	33	3.2	0.6	HE
3	I have a way of keeping records that enables me analyze community needs	230	70	30	3	33	3.5	0.6	HE
4	Information from television gives me clues on how I can contribute to community needs	0	0	300	33	33	1.9	0.3	LE
5	Listening to the radio, I have gotten information that involved me in community projects	0	0	33	30	33	1.1	0.3	LE
6	My records from my business also a avails me of information to satisfy community needs	230	70	30	3	33	3.5	0.6	HE
7	I have role models that make me know of things happening in the community	230	70	30	3	33	3.5	0.6	HE
8	I usually drop my opinion on community matters on social media platforms	0	0	33	30	33	1.1	0.3	LE
9	I get information from the internet about solving community problems	0	0	33	30	33	1.1	0.3	LE
10	I receive text messages that gives me community schedules	0	0	83	25	33	1.2	0.4	LE

11	I receive calls that make me know about community activities	50	30	140	11 3	33 3	2.0 5	1.0 2	LE
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(Field data, 2023)

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The results in Table 3 disclosed that town criers do not provide rural female entrepreneurs with information for community engagement as seen in S/N 1. The table further reveals that fellow traders and previous records, provide women with clues on community matters. Television, radio, internet, social media and text messages were not viable sources of information to enhance community engagement among rural women. Women attested that information for involvement in community development activities came from role models and mentors.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study indicates that rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State accessed information from local interactions with town criers, fellow traders, mentors and role models. Phone calls were also viable means of passing information to rural women in Rivers State. Messages from internet social media, television, radio and text were no feasible sources of reaching out rural women particularly in Rivers State. This finding is at variance with Gah, Nugroho and Arif (2020) who asserted that television, social media and role models were veritable means of informing rural women. The finding is rather in consonance with Patrick and Ferdinand (2016) who found friends and relatives as genuine information routes for female entrepreneurs. The result also reveals that though town criers were major means of informing female entrepreneurs in rural areas, they did not provide information to enhance business performance. Information that boosts business performance currently has been from fellow traders, mentors and personal records. Television, radio, internet and social

media that provide current updates and new business frontiers for modern day entrepreneurs, is not improving business performance among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State. This finding is in tandem with Saleh and Lasisi (2011) who found that information from fellow market women and friends were the basic sources of information for improved business outcomes among rural female entrepreneurs.

The study finally revealed from research question three that community participation among female entrepreneurs in Rivers State is enhanced with information from interaction with fellow traders, role models and personal records to a high extent. Women scarcely get information for community engagement from town criers, internet, social media television and radio. The implication is that information for involvement in community activities are not adequately passed to female entrepreneurs through viable means. This finding is in agreement with Akpomovie (2010) who lamented that community development activities are isolated to benefactors who impose incentives rather than involving female entrepreneurs in identification, planning, execution and management of development projects through information.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State access information from town criers, phone calls, personal records and interactions with fellow traders. Thus, these sources enhance their business performance and engagement in community development activities to a large extent. The study further concludes that rural female entrepreneurs in

Rivers State do not significantly access information from television, radio, internet, social media and text messages, thus, business performance and community engagement are not enhanced by these means.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations are pertinent;

1. Rural female entrepreneurs in Rivers State should intensify efforts to access information from television, radio, social media and text messages. They can do this by engaging friends and relatives who own and use these gadgets. ,
2. While Government and philanthropists provide intervention funds for survival of rural women businesses, they should provide information for improved business performance through town criers and local networks.
3. That community leaders, Government agencies and other benefactors should utilize town criers and phone calls to update and engage women in community matters. They should also sensitize them and use local interpreters to pass information available on the media for improved women engagement.

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