

*Full Length Research*

## Information Needs and Resource Utilization by Councillors in Benue State.

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This study was designed to investigate information needs and resource utilization among councillors in Benue State, Nigeria. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The design of the study was descriptive survey. Questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. Data was analysed using mean and standard deviation to test the research questions. The decision point was 2.50. The results of the study revealed that councillors need information for their legislative duties of passing by-laws on the functions assigned to them by the local government law 2007. The study identified the challenges faced by councillors in meeting their information needs to include non-availability of information materials; lack of internet and e-mail facilities; unorganized information sources; distorted and outdated information materials as well as unwillingness of staff of the bureau for local government and chieftaincy affairs to supply needed information. Suggested strategies for ameliorating the challenges include sourcing for current books; journals and periodicals. Assisting councillors to learn the use of modern information sources like the internet, CD plates, arranging the available information sources for easy retrieval and augmentation of information sources in the library among others were recommended.

**Keywords:** councilors, information needs, information materials, Challenges

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### INTRODUCTION

Information is indisputably one of the necessities of life just like food, shelter and clothing.

According to Okwilagwe (2000) information is an input, which reduces the level of uncertainty in any decision process. Igbaka and Atinmo (2002), described information as an important tool and a valuable resource required for the realization of any objective or goal set by organizations and individuals. In other words, Okoro and Okoro (2006) maintained that information is an indispensable factor for promoting the development of society, an essential part of a nation's resource being used as the raw material for making policies, for creating knowledge and fuelling the modern organization. Oguntuase and Akinbode (2007) noted that

information is central to all human activities, very essential to human survival and the life-blood of any organization.

Lawal, Nkereuwen and Edem (2008) defined information as data used in decision-making, and data include facts, symbols, figures, alphabet etc. In the opinion of Folorunso (2011), information is an assemblage of data in a comprehensible form capable of communication. This means that information is made up of facts put together in a particular form, which can be communicated or distributed.

Information needs according to Wilson (2000), are influenced by a variety of factors such as the range of information sources available, the uses to which information will be put, the background, motivation, professional orientation, and individual characteristics of the user. Aguolu and Aguolu (2002), described information need as what an

individual ought to have for whatever reason when an individual has a need for information. To Belkin in Nyam (2014), information need is the state when a person recognizes an anomaly in his state of knowledge and converts this anomalous state of knowledge into some communicable structures, for example request.

Chiemeke, Longe, Umar and Shaib (2007) believe that users approach the library with needs which they hope to satisfy. They categorized library users into four groups namely; general readers, creative readers, adult students and researchers with special interests. According to these authors, all these people utilize library resources for one purpose or the other. The purpose also informs the choice of resources consulted. They observed that the last category, that is researchers; concentrate on the utilization of textbooks, journals and other relevant resources for research as demanded by their different professions. Similarly, Doraswamy (2009) is of the view that the motives and purpose of the users for approaching the library determine the information resources that users are likely to consult. He claimed that most faculty members need information for the purpose of research and teaching and as such, they are desirous of information sources such as journals, theses and dissertations, government publications, conference proceedings and reference materials. He opined that libraries that can provide these resources and make access to them adequate would have gone a long way in making information retrieval a lot easier for researchers like the councillors.

A councilor is an elected representative on a local government legislative council. Once elected, they represent all their constituents and not just those who voted for them. They play a wider role in providing community leadership. They provide a vital link between the local authority and the communities, which they represent. Like the Federal and State government, the 1999 Constitution has enabled Local Governments in Nigeria to derive their existence directly from the constitution.

### Statement of the Problem

Just like customers and products, information must be well managed if the success of any organization is to be achieved. Like other resources, information if properly managed can lead to operational and managerial effectiveness. The absence of information to councillors is perhaps responsible for lack of good governance at the local government level.

Their legislative performance so far has made many people to perceive the local government system as a failure. This could be as a result, of the absence of accurate and up-to-date information. The apparent gap in knowledge shows that the information needs of the councillors, will not be adequately met. This also shows that the knowledge gap is perhaps responsible for the slow rate of development by

the local governments in the state, resulting in the non-provision of farm inputs on time. The problem of this study stated in question form therefore is: what are the information needs and resources utilization by councillors in Benue State?

### Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the information needs of councillors in Benue State?
2. What are the challenges faced by councillors in getting the information they need?
3. What are the strategies for meeting the information needs of councillors in Benue State?

### Literature Review

#### The Concepts of Information, Needs and Utilization

Information has no universally acceptable definition and as such, different scholars have defined it from their viewpoint.

According to Lawal (2007), information as a term denotes facts or data. He adds that it is needed in all spheres of life to facilitate decision-making and engender progress. The author contends that people need information about new developments and techniques in medicine, agriculture, social life and culture, science and technology, among others, so that they can improve on existing practices and better their lives. Information is a valuable resource required in any society; thus acquiring and using it are critical and important activities (Ozioko and Utor, 2009). To Nwokedi and Adah (2009), information is data that have been subjected to some processing functions capable of answering a user's query, be it in recorded, summarized or simply collected to help in decision-making. Hamrefors cited by Opara (2011) observes that information is a cornerstone for competence development.

The primary function of the library is to provide full range of information resources and services necessary to carry out the goals and duties of the library. (Imeremba, 2000), Akande (2003) notes that the use of library resources and services is uppermost in the minds of Librarians. This view was corroborated by Adeleke (2005) when he stated that the effectiveness of a library does not depend on its collection and other facilities per se but also on the success of its exploitation and use. He asserts that if the library is to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, it must not only provide the resources but also ensure effective use of the resources.

Libraries provide both access to information resources and the information itself. They produce people that are information literate and are prepared for lifelong education. Ubogu (2006) stated that libraries should provide access to information resources, expert professionals to facilitate thorough and accurate use of all library resources, access to library materials and services to the community. Chiemeké, Longe, Umar and Shaib (2007) believe that users approach the library with needs which they hope to satisfy. They categorized library users into four groups namely; general readers, creative readers, adult students and researchers with special interests. According to these authors, all these people utilize library resources for one purpose or the other. The purpose also informs the choice of resources consulted. They observed that the last category, that is researchers; concentrate on the utilization of textbooks, journals and other relevant resources for research as demanded by their different professions.

Similarly, Doraswamy (2009) is of the view that the motives and purpose of the users for approaching the library determine the information resources that users are likely to consult. He claimed that most faculty members need information for the purpose of research and teaching and as such, they are desirous of information sources such as journals, theses and dissertations, government publications, conference proceedings and reference materials. He opined that libraries that can provide these resources and make access to them adequate would have gone a long way in making information retrieval a lot easier for researchers like the councillors.

However, the provision of these resources and services is not enough and cannot promote the intended goals if the library is not effectively utilized. Agboola and Bamigboye (2011) buttressed this point by observing that libraries have the broadest possible collection of books and other essential materials but the utilization of such resources is far more important. Similarly, Ogunshye as cited in Imeremba (2011) argued that neither a good book nor a good library can make the individual educated. It is the successful use of books and libraries that makes the well informed, stable and well adjusted learned individual. The implication of these positions is that in as much as availability of information resources is important, it is the successful utilization of these resources, that is of utmost importance.

In the same vein, Ajibola (2000) remarked that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) helps users to have cheap access to database with multimedia capacities as well as helps to improve bibliographic control, error reduction in data analysis and increases the range and scope of research operations. There is no doubting the fact that information and communication technology has tremendously altered the way and even the resources available to researchers and other library users. The foregoing shows the various levels of library resources utilization and the purposes for such utilization. However, it is not clear from the literature whether the utilization of these

library resources influences the information retrieval practices, and whether access tools play a major part in aiding the utilization of library resources.

The availability of information and communication technologies and their applications to information delivery have opened up a new and wider horizon for users of information. Its products such as computer, the internet, online databases, CD-ROMs and networks have provided opportunities to widen the scope of resources and services. Accordingly, Adams as cited in Ezema (2008) reported that electronic information made available by networks has opened a new vista to African researchers, academics and students as well as technocrats. This is because electronic networks have largely addressed the challenges of physical document delivery and unavailability of many of these documents. In this way, links among information centres in Nigeria will not only help in addressing the challenges of lack of relevant information needed but will also help in increasing collaborations among these institutions.

In this regard, Kamba (2008) maintains that the internet provides users with the means of carrying out research online by acting as the main engine for exchanging information and publishing. He observed that the use of the internet by Nigerians has reduced the shortage of information resources in Nigeria and consequently enhanced information retrieval. The reason, according to him, is that the internet has the capacity to provide an enabling environment for Nigerian scholars and researchers to overcome the barriers of locations, communication and collaboration.

The 1999 Constitution provided local governments with full power vested in the other two levels of government. Indeed chapter 8, Section 283-307 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution made adequate provision for the smooth operation of local governments in the country. Because of Decree No 23 of 1991, retained by the 1999 constitution, Local Government now consists of two organs. The legislative body, which is the major focus of this study, and the executive arm, which includes elected Chairman (as Chief executive) vice Chairman, appointed supervisors and the Secretary to the local government. The Judicial arm however does not exist at the local government level. Legislative powers vested in the local government are exercised through bye laws as provided for in Decree No. 23 of 1991 (Nasir 2009).

## METHODOLOGY

The design adopted for this study is descriptive survey. The design is considered suitable for the study because it enabled better investigation of the subject under study. According to Nworgu (2006), descriptive survey is one that is aimed at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The population of this study

consists of two hundred and seventy six (276) councillors elected from each of the local government areas during the 2012 election of local government councillors. There are 23 local government areas in Benue State. The study only covers councillors who were elected and served between 2012 – 2014 who represented the 276 wards in the 23 local government areas that make up Benue State.

The sample for the study consisted of all the two hundred and seventy six (276) councillors in the 23 local government in Benue State. Due to the small size of the population, the researchers decided to census all of them, hence there was no sample.

The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire; titled "Information Needs and resources utilization by councillors in Benue State [INRUCBS]. The instrument is based on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4; Agree (A) 3; Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1. The data were analysed using descriptive and statistics of mean and standard deviation. The decision rule was 2.50.

The results were presented in line with the research questions that guided the study. Means and standard deviation are calculated for every question raised. Means above 2.50 showed agreement, while means below 2.50 showed disagreement.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Research question 1: What are the information needs of councillors in Benue State?

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of the Information Needs of Councillors in Benue State

S/N	Information needs of councillors	N=247	X	SD	Decision
1.	Information that will enable me participate actively in legislative proceedings		3.70	0.46	Agree
2.	Information on local government policies		3.68	0.47	Agree
3.	To get information about past legislation		3.57	0.49	Agree
4.	Information on agriculture		3.36	0.48	Agree
5.	To know the needs of my constituency		3.20	0.40	Agree
6.	Information on education		3.07	0.25	Agree
7.	Information on health		3.04	0.21	Agree
8.	Information on Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs)		3.02	0.20	Agree

### Research question 2: What are the challenges faced by Councillors in getting the Information they Need?

**Table 2.** Mean and Standard deviation of the responses of Councillors on the challenges they face in Meeting their Information Needs

S/N	Challenges	N=247	X	SD	Decision
1.	Bureau staff unwilling to supply needed information		3.97	0.20	Agree
2.	Lack of internet facilities		3.95	0.27	Agree
3.	Incomplete information materials		3.10	0.32	Agree
5.	Difficult to know when new materials are acquired		3.00	0.14	Agree
6.	Some information materials outdated		2.99	0.16	Agree
7.	Unavailability of information sources		2.98	0.37	Agree
8.	Information too vast		2.22	0.62	Disagree
9.	Information highly unorganized in the libraries		2.17	0.45	Disagree
10.	Distorted information		2.16	0.45	Disagree

### Research Question 3: What are the strategies for improving the information needs of councillors in Benue State

**Table 3.** Mean and Standard Deviation of the Responses of Councillors on Strategies for Improving the Information Needs of councillors in Benue state.

S/N	Suggested Strategies	N=247	X	SD	Decision
1.	Inter library loan services		3.99	0.14	Agree
2.	Internet facilities should be acquired		3.99	0.14	Agree
3.	Acquire current information sources in the library		3.99	0.13	Agree
4.	The library should engage in information packaging and repackaging		3.99	0.13	Agree
5.	Expose councillors to modern day library services and techniques		3.97	0.23	Agree
6.	Augmentation of information materials in the library		3.91	0.39	Agree
7.	More trained staff be employed		3.12	0.33	Agree
8.	Introduce selective dissemination of information		3.12	0.33	Agree
9.	Retrain a reference librarian to take care of councillors' needs		3.11	0.31	Agree
10.	Introduce Current Awareness Services (CAS)		3.11	0.32	Agree
11.	The librarian should assist councillors to learn how to browse and send e-mail		3.11	0.32	Agree
12.	Arrange information materials for easy retrieval		3.04	0.19	Agree
13.	Freedom of information		3.03	0.19	Agree
14.	Acquire current information sources in the library		3.02	0.13	Agree

## Discussion of Findings

### Information needs of councillors

The findings of this study revealed the major information needs of councillors to include information about past legislation, constituency, local government policies and legislative proceedings as well as information on health, education, agriculture and non- governmental organizations (NGOs). These findings agree with Offor (2000) who noted that since the primary function of the parliamentarians is to make good laws for the governance of the country, councillors inclusive, they must have information on various laws, legislations, decrees etc. while Barkindo (1998) noted that legislators need information on issues of national interest. This goes to say that councillors need information on local government system and the constitution.

### Challenges associated with getting needed information

This study revealed that councillors face a number of challenges in meeting their information needs. The result of this study revealed that staffs of the bureau for local government, typical of the civil service are usually unwilling

to supply useful information to the councillors. This finding is in agreement with Ifidon and Ifidon (2008) who stated that administrative staff who should be creators and custodians of information are sometimes reluctant to commit anything into writing for fear of being implicated when commissions of enquiry are set up. The unavailability of information, coupled with the fact that, it is usually unorganized, distorted and sometimes outdated and inadequate staff to attend to councillors. Internet and e-mail facilities are unavailable. This finding again corroborates Obidike's (2007) finding when he noted that internet facilities are not available in their departmental office or personal offices. Obidike (2007) went on to say that in spite of this, academic staff of social works department avail themselves of internet facilities in UNN cyber café, UNN computing centre etc. In their opinion, the quality of information from the web is very good. Uche (1999) conducted a similar study to determine the problems facing parliamentarians in meeting their information needs and came out with the finding that there are insufficient staff to attend to users, frequent staff turnover for various reasons, lack of experienced staff and noted that all these affect parliamentarians in meeting their information needs.

### Strategies to address the challenges

To minimize the challenges faced by councillors in meeting their information needs, the councillors indicated the following measures:

Information materials/resources in libraries and information centres should be augmented to take care of the special needs of the councillors.. This will go a long way in assisting councillors to fulfill the functions assigned to them by the local government law of 2007. A reference librarian to take care of the special needs of the councillors and their information seeking behaviour should be retrained to take care of the special needs of the councillors, since they have no time to devote to information seeking. They require information with the least effort. This is in agreement with Zip F.'s theory of least effort which states that most information seekers do so with the least effort. This can also enable the councillors to obtain information from the right source and avoid over dependence on colleagues and party members. As information obtained from colleagues and party members may be watered down to achieve certain political gains.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study revealed that councilors have different information needs such as passed legislation; constituency, local government policies and legislative needs and adopt different approaches to meet their information needs. From this conclusion, the study recommend that:

1. The various local government legislative houses should be provided with libraries or information centres and staffed with qualified Librarians to attend to the needs of the councillors.
2. Seminars, workshops and training programmes should be organized regularly for councillors to train them in the use of modern information and communication technology (ICT) facilities.
3. Special budgetary provisions should be made for the running of legislative libraries/information centres.

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