

THE LIBRARY AND THE RURAL WOMAN¹

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It has been confirmed that about 80% of persons living in Nigeria³ live in the rural areas. This therefore makes it very necessary that this population has to be enlightened and educated so that this country can meet up with the developed nations. The basic function of the library in a rural area is therefore to collect and keep all printed, oral and audio visual materials which are needed for the individual or group life of the community. After it collects, it interprets and guides the use of such materials so that as many persons as possible can use them in their daily lives.

If any library lacks the ability of collection, organization and distribution, interpretation and guidance it will give a sub-standard service.

The materials available in the library must be such that the rural community will depend on it most of the time for its varied information needs.

I wish at this juncture to make it clear that the materials stored in the library are not only books. The Library also keeps materials like magazines, journals, pamphlets, documents, films, tapes and discs and carries out other duties which we will know later.

In a nutshell we can say that the library provides materials to:

- a. Assist in informal self-education of the people in the

- b. Enrich and develop subjects on which the people are carrying out formal education.
- c. Satisfy the informational needs of the people.
- d. Support the civil, cultural, and political activities of groups and organizations.
- e. Promote recreation and good use of leisure time.

It is on record that majority of rural women can read and write because they have attended primary schools. Some have also acquired this literate ability through adult education. These women should therefore be encouraged to keep up these abilities in order to follow the developmental tracts in the country. It is only the library which can offer such assistance by providing the needed reading materials.

In Kaduna State there is a Library Board which has 6 branches in Zaria, Saminaka, Kachia, Kafanchan, Ikara and Birnin Gwari. The Headquarters is in Kaduna. There are plans to ensure that each of the remaining Local Government headquarters has a branch. In addition to this, most of the Local Government Areas have reading rooms in their district headquarters. These are encouraging steps towards providing library services for the people. It will therefore be a useful service if villages catch on to this beginning and set up their small reading rooms. I believe if this is begun, the State Library Board will come in to assist, if approached.

As women, we can get any type of book we need in the library. From cookery to sewing, handicrafts to home and family, culture to social studies, local history, religion, hygiene to baby care, to

name a few, we can get in the library. As long as such topics have ever been identified, books would have been written on them, and they will be in the libraries. You need to walk into a library and ask for a book on any subject man has ever known and you will get it.

Magazines and journals can also be found in libraries. Some of these deal with single topics while some are general. Others deal with serious current affairs while some deal with the light side of current issues. All these are provided to satisfy the varied interests of the people.

Government documents like decrees, edicts, laws etc. which every citizen needs to know so that she will not go against them can be found in the library. As soon as they are published the library collects copies. In some places the very important ones are translated into local languages so that everyone can read.

The library organises exhibitions of write ups on topics or subjects relevant to that area at regular intervals. For instance, most libraries would have in the period between 20th July - 4th August 1991 organised exhibitions on the revision of voters register. This is to enable those who come to the library within that period to read all what it is about and know the usefulness. In another case if guinea worm infection has hit the area the library puts up an exhibition to educate the people on the dos and donts in order not to be infected or if infected how to be cured.

Most times there are social, cultural, or agricultural activities by societies or organizations in that area. When the

librarian gets to know of this before the time she will provide assistance in the form of reading materials. She will also make arrangements to get the very important ones recorded on paper and on audio and video tapes. These are kept for future use and can serve as a basis for other persons wishing to start such activities to learn from.

The library also arranges with the Ministry of Information to show on regular basis, films on various topics like health education, political or civic responsibilities and for recreation, to the community to make them aware of what is happening in other parts of the country.

Sometimes workshops or seminars on various topics like good housekeeping, political education, cottage industries can be organised by the library in conjunction with other organisations who are experts in those fields. Such workshops are of immense use to the rural women in increasing their knowledge in such fields.

The library also supports the services of the adult education centres by providing books, pictorial aids, audio and video cassettes.

As a regular feature, the library encourages women to spend some of the proceeds of their sales to set up home libraries for themselves and their children, because if you develop the reading habit in a child she grows up to become well educated. However small one earns, one can get a useful book to buy. We need to start something before we ask the government to assist. It is easier to get amenities that way.

The library also assists rural women to put down their life

experiences, or history, as well as methods of producing various handicrafts and cottage industries hitherto known to only themselves. These information can be put in written or oral form and they can be produced for the benefit of other women.

In the same vein, during lectures or when the women visit the library they are told to listen to the radio as often as possible to enable them know of what is happening around them. Sometimes a radio and television will be provided in the library where popular programmes can be listened to and viewed.

The library with the assistance of the village head can organise debates on crucial topics relevant to the community. This programme as it is educative, is also enlightening and a means of identifying and developing various talents in the area.

The walls of the library also serve useful purposes in various government campaign programmes, be they social assets or evils. Posters of say the effects of drug abuse, immunisation, good handling of the naira etc can be pasted in the library which reminds the people constantly of them. What people see can be easily remembered than what they hear.

We cannot provide things for the women without thinking of the children. A children's library service can be a very interesting and rewarding activity.

Apart from providing reading materials; the library provides other activities for the children.

There are times the children can be taken through an arts and crafts session, nature study and story telling hours. These are called extension activities and are well accepted by children.

During these story telling times, the mothers are invited to participate. Such stories are recorded and can be used for exchange purposes with other cultures.

The library encourages the rural women to go through the books of their children after school and encourage them to work harder. Even those who are illiterate can still ask the children leading questions to make believe that they know about what work the child might have done in the book. In the same way they should encourage her children to use the library.

Every library has rules and regulations and a rural library is no exception. There might be some fines for using books badly or losing them. This should not discourage women or their children from using the library. Instead they should look at it as a means of helping them to develop a sense of responsibility.

Rural libraries can provide a reading list for women on various topics of interest to them. This makes it easier for them to locate what they need in the library. Book talks where the librarian tells them what the subject is in some selected books, is also a useful service to rural women.

Conclusion

What are listed above are the major services the library can provide for the rural woman. In the course of providing these, there are definitely some incidental services which come along. We believe that enlightenment and education are essential in this modern world. Since each person cannot have all reading materials under her roof, the library therefore becomes the only place where one can get all these materials at little or no cost, so it is

necessary that each citizen makes good use of the library.

The rural library has a lot of usefulness for the rural woman. In these days when everyone is striving to be educated or trained in one skill or the other, the onus falls on the library to make such materials to be used available. It is however one thing to provide the materials and another thing for the people to come and use them. I am therefore, through this medium appealing to all rural women to use the library and also to the various organisations which constantly have relations with them, to tell them to visit the various libraries or reading rooms in their vicinity. Where there is none, they should decide to set up one and when they inform us we^l will assist them in planning and making the necessary connections for them to have a sustained service. This is the contribution female librarians are making towards the drive to uplift the standard of living of our sisters in the rural area.

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3. NTA National Programme Stewardship of Tuesday 30th July 1991 at 8.00pm.
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