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AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE AND PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH INFORMATION UTILIZATION FOR POLICY DECISION-MAKING IN NIGERIA.

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Summary

The study was set to analyze the role and problems associated with information utilization for policy decision-making. It was a survey of four hundred (400) policy-makers drawn from ministries and parastatals using simple random sampling. A researcher-made instrument "Information Utilization Questionnaire" (IUO) was the main instrument used in data collection. Analysis revealed that item A in Table 1 was the highest observed role of information utilization in policy decision-making, while item G in Table 1 was the lowest observed role of information utilization in policy decision-making. Item C in Table 2 was the most prevailing problem to information utilization in policy decision-making while item D in Table 2 was also observed to be the least prevailing problem to information utilization in policy decision-making. The obtained t-values in Tables 3 and 4 of 29.34 and 27.14 respectively were tested for significance by comparing them with the critical t-value at 0.05 levels with 393

degree of freedom. It was observed that the obtained t-values of 29.34 and 27.14 respectively are greater than the critical t-value (1.96), therefore, the results are significant. That means that, there is significant influence of the role and problems of information utilization respectively on policy decision-making in Nigeria.

Background of the Problem

The attainment of good policy decision centres solely on effective utilization of available information resources. Policy-makers in any policy-making environment see information as a veritable tool and resource whose utilization will enhance assessable and appreciable performance. The processes involved in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation of government programmes in all sectors of the society require information utilization. This is so because many areas of already formulated policies bordering these sectors like education, economic, social, politics religion and technology require constant use of information sources. And, these policies still need examination and explanation on how they can impart positively on the society. Therefore, whether in an information poor or information rich environment, the policy-maker despite perceived problems is expected to identify those elements of an information service they really have on hand, what organizational enhancement is required and most important of all what is expected to be achieved on optimum degree of information utilization.

There is need to evolve a good information utilization policy framework that will expectedly guide Nigerian policy-makers to formulate policies that would ensure a smooth take-off of government programmes and also engender aggressive rural transformation. By implication, information utilization efforts by government (policy-makers) should be geared towards the achievement and adequate provision of information to all the nooks and crannies of the society. Policy-makers irrespective of

the enormity of associated problems, as a matter of role must recognize the relevance of information (mass media-print and electronic), even the film industry which has the potential for adequately informing, mobilizing the citizenry as well as providing a forum for even exchange of views between government and the governed. The Nigerian society today needs a sound information and communication system that will accelerate the generation, dissemination and utilization of information from all levels of government down to the people. Among the envisaged roles and problems associated with information utilization in policy-decision making is that of information imbalance among Nigerian rural and urban populace. Nkanu (2004) reports that, there is rural/urban information imbalance in Nigeria. As a result of this imbalance, adequate provision of information for utilization is not always certain at the time it is most needed. It is worthwhile to advocate now for a sustained information policy to give credence to the establishment of information networks to correct the seeming rural/urban information imbalance among Nigerians.

One of the most remarkable developments in modern society has been what is variously described as information explosion, information revolution or the advent of the information age or information society. Since about the mid-1970's according to Oyinloye (2001), mankind has witnessed phenomenal growth in the number and variety of information products, services, systems and sources. The catalyst of the growth is occasioned by the rapid innovations in electronic technologies for creating, processing, communicating and using information. These innovations have prompted the creation and accumulation of data and other information resources, in the information sophistication of the society. This assertion is in line with Afolabi's (2001) observation that, the information age in which we are was made possible by a number of factors which include the manner in which individuals and government create, store, retrieve and disseminate information from various sources. In various levels of government operations, information is needed for policy formulation, implementation and

evaluation, which of course would flow through many sources to policy decision-makers. Information utilization in policy decision-making is therefore based on the need to select and utilize information that is relevant to any policy formulated either by government or individual. Before any piece of information is used, it must be available, relevant and accessible to meet the needs of prospective policy-makers.

The major difference between the advanced and developing countries reflects the inequality in the generation, dissemination and utilization of information for social, political, educational, economical, cultural and technological advancement. For any meaningful development to take place in Nigeria, information must be seen or regarded as an important resource alongside other resources for development. In line with this assertion, Nkanu (2004) also reports in a study on "An Assessment of the Economic Value of Information in the areas that relate to the achievement of overall goals. In Nigeria government policies are formulated in areas that bordered on needs of the governed such as housing, transport, crime, security, rural development, education, welfare, defence, health, agriculture, wages and salaries, information and culture, technology, et cetera.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of this study is to ascertain whether policy-makers in Nigeria make judicious use of information relating to the policies they formulate.

Specifically, this study seek :

1. To determine the role of information utilization in policy decision-making in government.
2. To determine the problems associated with information utilization in policy decision-making in government.
3. To make necessary recommendations that will lead to effective information management, control and utilization in policy making matters.

Table 1: Percentage Analysis of the Role of Information Utilization for Policy decision-making

ROLE OF INFORMATION UTILIZATION	ACTUAL FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE FREQUENCY
A Reduces uncertainty of situation during policy formation, implementation and evaluation.	71	18.02**
b Serves as mechanism for communication of plans, forecasts, procedures and guideline in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation.	66	16.75
C Supplies historical evidence on levels of performance, results of policy decision, etc.	55	13.96
d Assists in reduction of complexities through enhancing policy-makers knowledge and understanding of situation.	47	11.93
e Forms the bedrock in any planning process of policy formation, implementation, evaluation and decision making in government.	61	15.48
f Adequately utilized information helps to reduce duplication of efforts, planning without data, wastage of money on unreliable projects during decision making.	60	15.23
g Helps policy makers to ask the right type of questions, judge the right answers and access the relevant information on decisions already taken.	34	8.63*
Total	394	100%

Source: Field Work 2006.

** The highest observed role of information utilization for policy decision-making.

The Research Questions

1. What is the role of information utilization in policy decision-making in government?
2. What are the problems associated with information utilization in policy decision-making in government?

Hypotheses

- Ho₁:** There is no significant influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making in government.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant influence of the problems associated with information utilization on policy decision-making in government.

Methodology

The research design used for the study was a survey approach. The population was made up of senior management staff in ministries and parastatals in Nigeria. A sample size of 394 Senior Management Staff was randomly selected from three state capitals in Nigeria namely, Uyo, Calabar and Port Harcourt of South-South Zone of Nigeria. Of this number 177 respondents were drawn from ministries and 217 respondents were drawn from parastatals. A researcher-made questionnaire "Information Utilization Questionnaire" (IUQ) was used for data collection for the study.

* The lowest observed role of information utilization for policy decision-making.

Table 1 above shows the analysis of the Respondents' views on the role of information utilization in policy decision-making. To answer the research question, the roles of information utilization were identified as contained in items a - g in the table. It was expected of the respondents to make their choice of which of the roles of information utilization in policy decision-making they see as most appropriate to them. Frequency distribution of the responses of the respondents was observed from the responses analysis the highest observed role with 18.02% value was "reduces uncertainty of situation during policy formulation, implementation and evaluation". The second was "serves as a mechanism for communication of plans, forecasts, procedures and guidelines in policy formation, implementation and evaluation" with percentage of 16.75%. The third was that "it forms the bedrock in any planning process of policy formulation, implementation and evacuation with the percentage value of 15.48%. The fourth was "adequately utilized information, helps to reduce duplication of efforts, planning, without data, wastage of funds on unviable projects during decision-making" with percentage value of 15.23%. The fifth was "supplies historical evidence on levels of performance and results of policy decision" with the percentage value of 13.96%. The sixth was "assist in reduction of complexities through enhancing policy-making knowledge and understanding of situations" with percentage value of 11.93. The seventh was "helps policy-makers to ask the right questions, judge the right answers and access the relevant information on decisions already taken" with percentage value of 18.63%.

From the above result, it is proved that information utilization plays important role in many ways at different levels in policy decision-making in government. This fact was confirmed by Nkanu (2003) who reported that, there is a growing desire for information in recent times. That, this desire has lead government to fall back on information for assistance in policy decision-making. He also maintained that, with the heightened emphasis on information, policy-makers have come to recognize that information is a vital element in government operations. These also confirm the fact that, information forms the bedrock in any planning process of policy formation and decision-making by government. Within the broad role of enhancing knowledge, information

as confirmed by the results contribute to the reduction in uncertainty of situation, provides error signal, highlights potential problem areas in planned performance, supply historical evidence on levels of performance; results of decisions and so on in decision-making.

Table 2 above shows analysis of the respondents views on the problems associated with information utilization. The problems of information utilization were identified as contained in items a-d in the table. It was expected of the respondents to make choice of the problem they felt is more prevalent to policy decision-making. Frequency distribution of the responses of the respondents was observed. From the percentage analysis, it was observed that the most prevalent problem of information utilization is “lack of policy-makers knowledge of information package preferred (i.e. format presentation of information to target audience)” with percentage value of 35.03%. The second was “lack of knowledge of the areas of information needs” with the percentage value of 28.68%. The third was lack of knowledge information sources widely used” with percentage value of 23.09% and the least was “uncertainty of the degree of policy-makers information consciousness” with percentage value of 13.19%.

Influence of the Role of Information Utilization on Policy Decision-making

In order to access the influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making, this hypothesis was formulated for testing. The null hypothesis states that:

There is no significant influence of the role of information utilization by policy-makers on policy decision-making. To test this hypothesis, two variables were identified. The roles were combined together and considered as independent variable, while policy decision-making was identified as the dependent variable. Based on the design of the items in the questionnaire in which the two variables were measured in one group of item in internal scale of measurement under the Role of information utilization, Population t-test analysis was used by comparing the observed mean with the expected.

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Table 2: Percentage Analysis of the Problems Associated with Information Utilization for Policy-making.

PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION UTILIZATION		ACTUAL FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE FREQUENCY
a	Lack of knowledge of the areas of information needs.	113	28.68
b	Lack of knowledge of information sources widely used.	19	23.09
c	Lack of policy-makers' knowledge of information packages preferred (i.e. formats presentation of information to target audience	138	35.03**
d	Uncertainty of the degree of policy-makers' level of information consciousness,	52	13.19*
<i>Total</i>		394	100%

Source: Field Work 2006

** The most prevailing problem associated with information utilization

* The least prevailing problem associated with information utilization.

Table 3: Population t-Test Analysis of the Influence of the Role of Information Utilization by Policy-Makers on Policy Decision-Making

VARIABLE	NO. OF ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	t
Observed influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making,		22.6	3.45	
	7			29.34*
Expected influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making,		17.5	3.85	

*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 393; critical value 1.96 N = 394

In table 3 above, the obtained t-value was 29.34. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value at 0.05 level with 393 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (29.34) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the result was significant. This result therefore means that, there is significant influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making in government. This is in line with hypothesis 1 on the influence of the role of information utilization on policy decision-making. Information is a gigantic industry in our national life especially as its utilization permeates every

aspect of human endeavour in the developed and undeveloped nations of the world. This implies that, for Nigeria to develop educationally, socially, culturally, politically, economically and technologically, the transfer of information and utilization between individuals, organizations, Government and non-government agencies is essential. This also confirms Nkanu's (2003) assertion that, the increasing desire for information in recent times has led government to fall back on information for assistance in policy decision-making. With the heightened emphasis on information, policy-makers in Nigeria have now recognized that information is one of the elements in government operations.

Influence of the Problems of Information Utilization by Policy-Makers in Policy Decision-Making

In order to access the influence of the problems of information utilization by policy-makers on effective policy decision-making, this hypothesis was formulated for testing. The null hypothesis states that: There is no significant influence of the problems of Information utilization by policy-makers on policy decision-making.

In order to test this hypothesis, two variables were identified. The problems were combined together and considered as independent variable, while policy decision-making was identified as the dependent variable. Based on the design of the items in the questionnaire in which the two variables were measured in one group of item in internal scale of measurement under the heading "Problems of Information Utilization", Population t-test analysis was used. This was done by comparing the observed mean with the expected.

Table 4: Population t-test Analysis of the Influence of the Problems of Information Utilization by Policy-Makers on Policy Decision-Making

VARIABLE	NO. OF ITEMS	\bar{X}	SD	t
Observed influence of the problems of information utilization on policy decision-making.		13.8	2.83	
Expected influence of the problem of information utilization on policy decision-making.	4			27.14*
		10	3.16	

N = 394

*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 393; critical t-value = 1.96.

In table 4 above, the obtained t-value was 27.14. This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value at 0.05 level with 393 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (27.14) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96); hence, the result was significant. This result therefore means that, there is significant influence of the problems of information utilization by policy-makers on policy decision-making in government.

This is in agreement with Etim's (2001) assertion that, the use of information sources in information utilization is influence by the extent to which these sources provide information required for problem solving activities. As a result of the the one who expected to understand the value and nature of information suitable for consumption while formulating, implementing and evaluating policies in government.

Discussion

From the above results, it is appropriate to say that policy-makers in Nigeria encounter many problems in the cause of their information utilization efforts in policy decision-making. These problems are encountered at different levels, and these may be lack of knowledge of the areas of information needs, lack of knowledge of information sources widely used, lack of knowledge of information formats presentation to target audience as confirmed by the results above. In line with the above results on information utilization problems, the policy-makers are those who need to understand the value and nature of information services that can be provided. In government, most of these policies are always formulated in the areas of needs such as housing, transport and communication, security, crime, rural development, education, health, agriculture, commerce, technology, etc. where this is not applicable, problems are sure to escalate in that environment.

The results have confirmed that the methods of information presentation to target audience constitute the most serious problem to information utilization by policy-makers. Nkanu (2004) has also confirmed this fact, and that was the major reason he has advised that, it is not enough that the relevant information is made available at the right time to the policy-maker. Establishing knowledge on information utilization among varying categories of users has revealed that such relevant information has to be presented to its target audience in an employable format. Such presentation often involves consideration and repackaging the communication gap that has existed in many countries, between the knowledge producer and the policy-maker. Information presentation to target audience constitute the most serious problem to information utilization by policy-makers. This confirms one of the major reasons why Nkanu (2004) advised policy-makers to be conscious to know that, the fact that they often have easy access to relevant information at any time is not what matters. What matters most is the presentation format of this information to varying categories of users. He opined that, such presentation format should take into consideration the methods of bridging the communication gap existing in many countries between knowledge producers and policy-makers. It is also of importance to note of that, there is significant influence of the role and problems of information utilization respectively and policy decision-making as revealed by the null hypotheses formulated and tested in this study.

Recommendation

Arising from the need for information utilization in the overall development of the society, the authors hereby suggest that:

- i. Nigerian government should ensure that government officials in both ministries and parastatals are adequately exposed to the role and problems associated with

information utilization as it relate to their functions. This can be done through organized conferences, workshops and seminars.

- ii. Government should also evolve a sound information utilization policy that would accelerate the generation, dissemination, and utilization of information among officials in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Ideally, information utilization influences policy decision-making in government activities. This is evident in areas where government as well as individuals have many roles to play in policy formulation, implementation and evaluation at all levels of our national life. Information utilization is therefore, based on the need to select and utilize information that is relevant to any policy formulated either by government or individual. As the quest for information utilization

increases among government officials, it is expedient for policy-makers in Nigeria now to realize that, they need information for policy formulation, implementation and evaluation now than before.

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