

CULTURAL INFORMATION ACCESS AND UTILISATION BY RURAL WOMEN: A FRAMEWORK FOR UGANDA

by

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and

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Abstract

Uganda is well endowed with cultural diversity that critically needs to be harnessed because of its potential to improve the quality of life of the Ugandan people. Issues such as language and literary arts, indigenous knowledge, culture and environment, cultural tourism, culture and young people, belief system and values reside in women mainly and should be emphasized. Women in most cases are at the forefront of such issues as first teachers of language, and guardians of our cultures most especially in rural settings where more than 80 percent of our people reside. They are a majority in the country's population and therefore a cultural army of the country. Unfortunately they are not well catered for in many things they do or affecting them although they are most visible in local and cultural activities. To promote and strengthen Uganda's rich, and diverse cultural identities, enhance social capital, collaboration and participation in cultural life, promote community action on sound cultural practices that impinge on human dignity, and to conserve and protect Uganda's tangible and intangible heritage, information provision is important. Although there are efforts in providing information at various levels of education and other sectors of society, no strategy addresses the cultural information needs of rural women in Uganda specifically. Creating opportunities for society to understand and appreciate rural women and cultural information is essential. This paper aims at providing strategies for facilitating access and utilization of cultural information about the Ugandan cultures.

Introduction

Women play significant role in all forms of development. In Uganda they are the main producers of food, and they are the backbone of the economy and are the providers of home health care, a key agent to human development. Despite the important roles they play, women are treated more as property with monetary interest vested in the father and later in the husband (Kampororo, 2002). A situation analysis of the Ugandan society reveals that, the environment under which women operate is not adequately supportive for them to acquire information and document their own situations. The majority of them are disadvantaged by illiteracy or semi-illiteracy. They are mostly poor in economic terms. They are also disadvantaged by inadequate access to information simply due to inappropriate methods of communicating information. They have no time to look for information because they are heavily involved in family chores. Married women have even more problems. Their spouses limit their participation in information based activities outside their homes, thinking that seminars/workshops are platform for gossiping and promiscuity. In the village set up, a typical rural woman is one who is painstakingly misunderstood as one who knows little about reading and writing, and whose knowledge is confined only to her home and the neighborhood, one who spends a lot more time digging, fetching water and firewood, looking after children and the elderly. This is what has deterred women for long from attaining adequate social changes in activities they perform. Several women activists working both at community and national levels have since echoed this. The need is to address such attitudes and make it easy for women especially rural women to access relevant information so that they may use it for their betterment. This paper attempts to address this issue by presenting a framework by which rural women can access and utilize cultural information for development.

The Problem

Women play a crucial role in development and when a woman is educated, a whole nation is. Women need the right information at the right time and with great respect from round them so as to make them develop. This seems not to

be effectively implemented especially in villages are not accessible to development information. Most of them are ignorant of many things that could help them. Opportunities are lost when in fact they could do better of meaningful information. Where available, women need practical knowledge such as a matter of human rights, it should be given or at least made accessible and have been referred to as beasts of burden. There is therefore a need of exploiting opportunities of developing women especially those in the villages, so that they experience meaningful development. This study aims at developing a strategy for cultural information utilization for rural women in Uganda. The objectives are:

- To identify the cultural information needs of rural women
- To report the sources of cultural information for rural women
- To identify the problems associated with cultural information among the rural women in accessing and utilizing information
- To provide a framework for cultural information utilization for rural women in Uganda:

Literature Review

What is Culture?

The word culture has been used in different ways and many ways. Culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools/techniques, works of art, rituals, ceremonies and so forth (Orevbu 1997:5).

Culture manifests itself through music, art, painting, dance, folklore, language/literature, traditions, beliefs and values but also through its traditional legal system, its processes of governance and participation including the intricate links and transactions that define a society's character as well as its pattern of human and economic development. Culture is the sum total of the ways, in which a society preserves, identifies, organizes, sustains and expresses itself. Indigenous knowledge, its traditional medical, legal and rights system, its processes of governance and participation including the

intricate links and transactions of culture define a society's character as well as its pattern of Development (Draft Culture Policy of Uganda, 2003).

- Actually Urevbu (1997:6) and Kanyandago (2001:18) believe that culture means the totality of a given peoples life. It is what distinguishes one group of people from another. It deals with the way people relate among themselves with the physical environment. Reviewing Raymond Williams in his book *Culture and society*, Urevbu (1997:6) regards the concept of culture as consisting of four jointly applicable meanings:
- a general state or habit of mind, having close relations with the idea of human perfection
- a general state of intellectual development in a society as a whole;
- the general body of the arts; and
- a whole way of life, i.e. material, intellectual, and spiritual.

Like a person culture is born, it grows and it dies (Magara 2002:74). Culture is achieved through evolving specific ways of living that are different with those of other societies. Culture is associated to communities that need system for regulating their behavior (Magara 2002:74). This requires authorities and structures that define and regulate the cultures in a particular society.

Society and Rural Woman

A woman is an adult female of above 18 years of age. She is expected to maintain and sustain the life of a child from conception through childhood and has to see the child's later success in life. A typical rural women is one who knows little about reading and writing and whose knowledge is only confined to her home and at times she hardly knows what goes on beyond her surrounding (Kampororo 2000).

Rural African woman is that person who works nine to ten hours in the field. She spends seven to eight hours fetching water, collecting firewood, looking after children and the elderly. She also may have side enterprises so as to earn some money for the family.

Women in society have always been taken as inferior; they are always given the subordinate position in society. From the family, church, politics and social-economic order, women's background position can be explained by the way of society. This makes the barrier for women to go further than the traditional activities in society. Right from the way women are treated at home, roots of inequality are planted and these are very visible in some societies. Obbo (1982:3), observes that, inaccessibility of women is partly due to tradition. He says: "there were assumptions that women are better involved in crucial traditional activities". Byron (1989), tells of some Islamic traditions that tie the women down. He says that, "Inequality within Islamic marriage is institutionalized by law".

Women in society continue to be looked at as beasts of labor especially in the African society. Tinker observes that, women are like weapons of convenience to men.

Tinker (1982:45) says that; it is public knowledge that the poorest man is one without a wife to work for him, since women's work is for producing both subsistence and wealth. This is quite true because a poor man may not afford bride price. Therefore he will not afford a woman to do his donkeywork for him. So the woman remains the object of opposition while the men sit back to prosper.

Hooper (1975:35) did a study in Sierra Leone and noted that women there were considered unfit for leadership. People looked at women who were prospering in politics and business as those who had lost their womanhood. He adds in the western countries prominent in politics or business or some other professional what usually move towards a more masculine mode of behavior.

This is true even in the third world. Often women who prosper in business, politics and academics are compared to men. Society finds it unfit for women to involve themselves out of the home and often they are discouraged when they are called "Tom boys".

Description of the Ugandan Women

[*Ahu abashaija batari, abakazi bacwa emanja* (where there are no men, women becomes judges—Runyankore Rukiga)]

Women in Uganda have actively been involved in development activities. The Uganda labor force survey 2002/03 shows that the active rural women aged 10 years and above is 88.6% compared to 85.7% of men (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2003:14). The survey shows that 85.8% of women participate in agriculture, hunting and forestry. The main occupation of the rural women was found to be substance agriculture and fishery workers with 82.8%. The greater share of household tasks in Uganda is performed by a woman: cooking (86%), fetching water (70%), collecting firewood (73%), child Care (62%), washing Clothes (88%), and caring for sick and elderly (62%) (Ministry of Gender , labor and Social Development 1999:22). A study by Sayagues (1999:18) describes the status of a Ugandan that, "When a man is taken ill, the wife who nurses him lacks time to weed the maize field...this means less income from the cash crops". According to him, the available sources of income are used to pay to traditional healers and other costs.

A psychologist, Mbaga (1993), best describes Ugandan women as vulnerable and disadvantaged because they are surrounded by unfavorable circumstances and conditions. Domestic violence is the order of the day in most families. Everyday they are tortured mentally and physically. Their husbands beat, kick and drag them. A visit to most hospitals verifies this. When women get better, they usually get back to their husbands. It is not unusual that when women go to report such cases; police tells them these are domestic matters and can be solved in their homes. On the other hand, many of the Ugandan women are non-literate. Women in rural areas have very little, if any, formal education. Yet education is one way of channeling information. Because of that they remain ignorant of their rights. Women's rights and fundamental freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, are inalienable and guaranteed by law. Poverty too affects human rights. According to the Uganda Human rights Commission. ((2001:70) report, poor people find it difficult if not impossible to enjoy the right of health, education, clean and healthy environment, shelter, food, family planning and reproductive rights. Their protection is the first responsibility of government. According to FIDA,

the report noted, women are heavily dependant on their husbands for all the requirements. When the husband dies or divorces his wife, she is left helpless. For example in Mbarara District, maintenance (136), Inheritance (143), and marital dispute (111) cases were observed as the most of the complaints brought by women to FIDA in 2000. The other complaints concerned custody (12), defilement (3), land (26), Child abuse (26), property rights (45), consultation (2) and debt recovery (2). Government has enhanced the participation of Women in politics and decision making at national and local levels. . As of July 1997, the number of district local authorities personnel by category (RDC's, LC5, CAO) should only 12 women compared to 105 men Uganda 1998:50). The commission therefore recommended a health insurance policy and a need for coordination, cooperation and awareness of the issues of implications of the rights. Respect for them is an essential safeguard against an over almighty state. However, this requires a strategy for the social economic development in the country.

Religion as Culture: Field of Ritual

Uganda's cultural heritage includes artistic and cultural expressions. Artistic expressions include the various art forms and artifacts while cultural expressions include indigenous knowledge and skills, local languages, values, norms and traditions. Both traditional and modern religion looks at the complexities of life from a cultural context. According to Obiama (1990), women are generally well known for being religious, suggesting that religion permeates all aspects of their lives. According to Obiana, religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned. The fact that culture is gendered, so of course are religious practices (Nye 2000:7). Implied from this statement is that religion and socialization are complementary in the sense that they both deal with beliefs, values and practices of a group of people. Whereas women are vulnerable to discrimination and abuse in the name of religion, religious organizations can also play a positive role (Nkwake 2003;91). According to Nkwake, religious groups facilitate the societal developments in both the economic and social activities. The fact that the religious groups have participated effectively in Adult literacy, seminars and workshops, group meetings, visits has benefited both the individual

woman and members of the entire families—society. That's why Jordan as referred to by Nkawake (2003;96) believes that "all women's movements should be politically oriented or else will not make the big decisions, we won't make a comprehensive solution".

There has been however abuse of freedom of religion. The Uganda Human rights Commission (2001:76) analyses the cults doctrine where on 17th march 2000 a number of people died. It is believed that that the fact that "Women were separated from men and husbands from wives". The movement for the restoration of ten commandments violated the right to free speech by 'silencing people and forcing them not to talk to each other'. They also violated right to privacy and family 'forcing people to live collectively without any family privacy'. The commission recommended to the government, organizations and individuals to work together to monitor activities to guard against violation of human rights under the cover of freedom of worship and religion. "What is important is the change in attitude towards women's rights because without participation of women, democracy will never be complete", the Deputy Chair Person of the upper house of Parliament India, Dr. Najma Heptullah observes (Sharma 2000:30). This however requires a strategy to provide approaches of participation, empowerment in the development programmes.

Cultural Information

The culture of a society determines the nature (form and content) of development (Urevbu 1997:6). According to Mbagha (1993:26), culture is the total sum of people's way of life. This includes norms and values of a society: Their religion, politics, economics, technology, medicine and marriage rules, songs and dances, law, eating habits, artefacts, etc. In this context, culture is looked at as something that is continuous, relates to past to present future. All members of society interact with culture and participate in creating it. Adequate social interaction is a fundamental means of this participation. On the other hand, according to Schneider (1976:202) culture contrasts with norms in that norms are oriented to patterns of action, whereas culture constitutes a body of definitions, premises, statements, postulate presumptions, positions and perceptions. He says that culture is not simply a 'whole way of life' it grows out of man's relationship with nature. That's why

Magara (2002) believes that culture is a result of people's interaction with their environment. Actually Nzita (1995) believes that "culture changes owing to advancement of knowledge and skills". If a society fails to adapt to a changing environment, it is bound to stagnate. The culture of people that has been molded over centuries cannot die very early. People will always cling to what used to identify them. In fact, Africa owes much to the western world in the form in which information is transmitted. Various methods of providing information to the rural women would include community work, demonstration, via mass media, and through visual aids (Loutfi, Martha 1987).

There are a variety of sources of Information for rural communities. In a study conducted in 1998 under the project UGA/97/007, UNESCO identified the main sources of information at the grass roots (Department of Information 1999:37). Rumors, bars/restaurants, films and vide halls, hospitals, schools and institutions. The channels also include local council system, loud speakers, market place, newspapers, photographs, and posters/signposts. Radios, seminars/workshops, social-cultural ceremonial gatherings, telephones, fax, email, television, and networking between groups are also sources of information. There are also administrative units, research centers, places of worship, magazines, extension workers, soothsayers, alarm, theatre, folk media, letters, dreams, radio calls and meetings. From the study, it was established that "government should accept further responsibilities including regulation to retail sauce-cultural values in the face of economic liberalization". This however requires a framework to enable effective access to information.

Causes of Women's lack of Cultural Information

Information is empowering in itself: it is power. When people who control information actually govern it, choose it, hand it out, deliver it, and they do it for people whom they understand and reflect, the information spread is more even, more just, more fair and because of that, society is a better place. According to Imroth (1998:16), women lack Structural power to change and improve our institutions and our society". However she noted that power is neutral, not moral or immoral, but can be used for good or evil. According to Imroth, women are characterized by 3 types of power:- Condign power

(power by punishment), compensatory power (power of reward), and conditioned power (by changing belief, persuasion, education, or the social commitment to what seems natural, power or right). However, Imroth gives 2 risks of power area that are danger to women:

1. Using power as individuals, thinking we can do it on our own and rejecting the “feminist” label, while being in favor of women’s rights should not be a negative image; and
2. Exhibiting the classic behavior of powerless—using what power we do gain in the oppressive ways. We try to hold onto what little power we have rather than trusting our own power and being willing to pass it on and share it.

As a result, woman faces major obstacles to progress once they cannot freely access an appropriate medium to air out their views in order to reach to the right machinery responsible for positive change. Actually McGrath (1989:20) gives her experience with women:

Women are expensive about what they don't want—disinterest, brush off, the runaround, people too young to understand or too old to care, judgement, being told what to do, being regarded as stupid, being regarded as just a woman, just a housewife... and so on.

Hartwig (2000:33) acknowledges the role of women groups in the development process. Hartwig associated this to the reaction when women were asked by human rights organizations to join in a play on the subject “free and democratic election” and explained the experience thus “today it is easier for us to stand up at a meeting and to express our opinion. Even if men are present. Formally we were afraid to say any thing...”

A review of communication and development in Africa indicates that; most women in Africa live in rural areas where most of the modern media of information dissemination such as telephones, radios, newspapers, libraries and computers are lacking. The low literacy rate and poor income among women makes the idea of acquiring any one of the mentioned media a dream to most individuals and groups in the region.

It also indicates that most mechanisms of control of information and communication exclude women from the direction of change. As a result, most of the information in package by the publishing industry, as well as the mainstream media is managed by men, who in most cases still consider information on and about women as stems without significance. A strategy on how to cope with access to information is required.

The National machinery for access and utilization cultural information by rural women in Uganda.

The National machinery is important because without legal backing, women will continue to be down graded.

Women in the Ugandan laws

Making laws that promote utilization of information is an important element in measuring the state's compliance with international human rights instruments. The Uganda human rights Commission (2001:83) reports on laws, which were supposed to be consolidated in the domestic relations bill, which has also delayed to be passed. The related women laws include "The marriage Act, the marriage and divorce of Mohammedans, the Hindu marriage and device act, the divorce act, the customary marriages (registration) decree, succession act, the succession act (amendment) decree, land Act 1998, the administrators general Act, 1964.

Two articles (Articles 32-33) of the Constitution of Uganda (1995) are specifically devoted on women especially the common problems faced by them. Briefly these articles were included in the Constitution after consistently realizing that women are discriminated against, they face inhuman treatment, are deprived of property and are insecure.

Article 32(1) recognizes in general the marginalized groups in Uganda including women. It states that notwithstanding anything in this constitution, the state shall take affirmative action in favour of groups marginalized on the basis of gender, age, disability or any other reason created by history, tradition or custom, for the purpose of redressing imbalances which exist against them. **Article 33(1)**, is about observation of dignity of individuals. It states that women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men while

Article 33(2), says the state shall provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them realize their full potential and advancement.

Article 33(3) talks about protection of women. It says the state shall protect women and their rights, take into account their unique status and natural maternal function in society while **Article 33(4)** promises equality. It states that women shall have the right to equal treatment with men and that right shall include equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities.

In **Article 33(5)** the need for redressing historical imbalances in society is guaranteed. It says that without prejudice to Article 32 of the Constitution, women shall have the right to affirmative action for the purpose of redressing the imbalances created by history, tradition or custom. Finally, **Article 33(6)** includes laws that indicate the common problems Ugandan women face. It states that; laws, cultures, customs or traditions which are against the dignity, welfare or interest of women or which undermine their status, are prohibited by this Constitution.

Article 78, which concerns with the composition of parliament, reserves a seat for one-woman representative from every district while **article 180** determines that one third of the membership of each local government council shall be reserved for women.

Culture and Gender Policy

Uganda Vision 2025 aspires for a society that recognizes information as a national resource and coordinated network of information sources, systems and services (Uganda 1999:15). The Constitution of Uganda (1995) states that Uganda is made up of 56 indigenous communities representing Uganda's diverse cultural heritage. In its National objectives and directive principles of state policy, the constitution commits itself to the preservation, promotion and development of Uganda's Cultures and heritage. The Constitution commits itself to the promotion of culture particularly those aspects that enhance development and well being of all Ugandans. It also prohibits cultural practices that impinge on the dignity of people particularly women, children and people with disabilities. There has been an attempt at formulating a sector

policy to promote accessed utilization of information basing on the problem that:

Uganda is a patriarchal society where men are the dominant players in decision making, although women shoulder most of the reproductive, productive, and community management responsibilities, many of which are not remunerated or reflected in national statistics (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social development 1999:30).

That's why the Uganda's gender policy is to guide and direct at all levels the planning, resource allocation and implementation of programme from a gender perspective. It is a policy of government to ensure gender responsive development planning at all levels: Community, district and national. Although there are some attempts in the national planning in different aspects, there seems to be lack of a strategy to facilitate easy access and utilization of information by rural women in Uganda.

Strategies for Accessing Cultural Information

[Freedom of speech is the right to be fought for and not a blessing to be wished for. But it is more than that; it is a bridge of understanding and knowledge. It is the essential vehicle for that exchange of ideas between nations and cultures that is a condition for true understanding and lasting cooperation, Kofi Annan, UN secretary General (Doornaert 2000:46)]

For the empowerment of indigenous people and survival of their futures to be a reality, their education must be mediated by frameworks of knowledge, values and skills with strategies harmonious with societal transformation (Akankwasa 2001:251). According to Akankwasa, instead of porno graphing indigenous cultures and modern technology should make it positive for the exploitation of the socio-economic environment.

Ugandan laws and lately Uganda's draft cultural policy, documents the extent of Uganda's cultural information. Laws and conventions, written method, tape

recorded method, plays, music, dance and drama, filming, and painting are enduring methods used. Human development involves the empowering of people to be the origin, the agent and beneficiary of their social and economic processes while economic development involves the conscious linear increase in National Income, capital accumulation, industrialization, Urban expansion, technological progress and integration within the World market. Actually Birungi (1999:5) noted that 'unless African Women can participate in cyberspace, they will face new forms of exclusion from society'.

To access information materials, societies need to be literate about their needs. However, Riberio (2001:33) believes that literacy by itself cannot provide attitudes towards information utilization. It is important to note that economic development is not in itself sufficient to bring about improvements in peoples well being. This is because effective development has multiple dimensions; economic, social and cultural that, influence one another.

Methodology

A qualitative research endeavored to acquire first hand knowledge about Bakiga rural women from Kabale District and those were from five sub counties of Kigongi, Ruhita, Bunyonyi, Bukinda and Kyobugombe. Through an interview conducted among the Bakiga rural women and document analysis. Data analysis involved making logical decisions as to what respondents were referring to certain statements. Analysis was based on research questions of the study. Out of 60 respondents 6(10%) had completed higher institutions of learning, 6 (10%) secondary level, 24 (40%) Primary level and 24 (40%) not gone to school. The interviews also considered the marital status; 24 (40%) were married, 9 (15%) divorced, 15 (25%) Single parents, and 12 (20%) widowed. The study also considered employment status with 20% self employed, 15% housewives and 5% employed in civil service while the 60% are not employed at all.

Findings

Access and utilization information by rural women

The study aimed at finding the information needs for access and utilization of rural women in Uganda. According to the study, it established that the rural

women in Uganda access information through groups and discussions. Observations showed that they are expected to do all the house chores, dig the whole day, among many of the activities. Despite of the fact that meetings and participation groups being the most sources of information, majority of women seems not to have a chance to participate in productive gatherings. One woman interviewed in Kabale had this to say:

My husband is never at home. He goes to the bar from morning till late in the night. I am expected to feed my children and this leaves me no time to productive work.

From the study, it showed that rural women aim at meeting information needs. Among others, they need to know the following: their expectations, how to develop a strategy for cultural information utilization for fellow women. They need also to explore opportunities of developing their fellow women. Out of 20 rural women interviewed, 6 (10%) need information to explore opportunities of developing a woman, 15(25%) for developing a strategy for cultural information utilization, and 21(35%) for knowing the expectation of a woman while 18(30%) did not express any cultural information need.

The study also endeavoured to find out the type and sources of cultural information of rural woman. It was established that information provided to women is based on religion, women's rights and women physical ability.

The sources included rumours, story telling, fellow women, friends, radio, and listening. Twenty-four (40%) of the respondents seem to access the information from Rumours. One respondent who is a shop attendant gave the following statement:

According to our culture, we learn most of what we know from our aunties, mothers, and other elders, so by the time I grew up, I knew a lot about my culture

Inquiring about methods of disseminating cultural information, it was established that the methods vary depending on the needs of the culture needs. However, it was clear that the methods are more effective for those who can

read or write. The different methods used include televisions, radio, local meetings, and print media. Print media seemed to be among the least favored method of accessing information. Lack of written material materials in local languages seems to explain poor usage of print media as a source of information.

Televisions in Kabale Districts are limited. Even where the electricity existed, majority of the women could not afford to purchase a television. This seemed to be limited in terms of audience reached and territorial coverage in rural areas.

Radios also seemed not to be favored among the rural women. This was attributed to the fact that the radio programmes are more of an "entertainment toy" for small urban elite than informative media for those in need. One respondent, a woman representative on District level had this to say

I use my radio to listen to what goes on around my community. We have voice of Kigezi (VOK) which most people listen to because it is broadcast in Runyankole-Rukiga.

Local meetings also contribute much to the information accessibility for rural women. During meetings access to information is made in form of stories, rumors and then a final conclusion is made on what they are expected to do next.

Print media seemed to be a very effective method of accessing information among the elite rural women. However, this method seemed to be less useful to most of the women who can not read as demonstrated by one woman who had this to say, "I don't know English. I have never gone to school. May be you explaining in Rukiga because it is the only language I can understand".

The study went ahead to find out how people were able to acquire their information. It was clear that 15% use local FM stations, 25% from formation local groups, 25% for cultural gathering and 35% others. The study indicates that highest percentage get their information from elsewhere apart

from local FM stations, local groups, cultural gatherings. It was clear from the study that usually urban oriented programmes and cultural values of the rural folk who form 80% of the population are not considered. One-woman interviews had the following remarks:

We usually meet as a group and discuss important things that affect us as women. I think this is important for our young generation because they will also be informed through such important groups.

Effects of cultural information for rural Women

The study intended to establish the effects of cultural information on Bakiga rural women. It was clear that that cultural information was important (71%) for the respondents. Those that did not support whether cultural information is important (29%) say, "culture is part of them, so there is no need of making it an issue". However, one of the young respondents did not see the reason as to why culture was taken as important. Education actually affects the access to culture information "Most of the women are toed down by cultural rigidities and this has limited the illiteracy rate because they never get the required education".

Problems of Utilizing Cultural Information

It was the aim of this study to establish the problems of utilizing cultural information among the Bakiga rural women. Majority of the respondents agreed that they were ignorant about the existence of information services. They associated the problems of access to information with transport problems (20%), language barrier (20%), Some people do not want to reveal what they want (10%), poor or little education (40%), and no access to communication channels (10%). Poor education seems to a major course of inability to access and utilization of information. One of the women interviewed had this to say:

I was brought up in a family where my father did not want to educate us girls. And if I am to answer your questions, I have to first ask my husband.

This was a common saying by most of the women interviewed. However, the respondent did not specifically indicate what she meant by all this, whether

this is their culture expected of them or if she was protecting her marriage. Poverty, alcoholism, inadequate knowledge on laws has contributed to the inadequate access to information. Some of the expressions are:

- *Poverty is at a very high rate where by us rural people are suffering a lot which builds a lot of pressure in our families.*
- *Unless were informed about current laws, our rights will continue to be abused.*
- *For some of us who are not so educated the only way can get out of this poverty is through further education and this can only be possible if we are informed about opportunities available out there.*
- *I would rather remain ignorant and backward than staying in order to listen to news*
- *I can't waste for my time attending endless meetings because I have got other things to do.*

Strategies for Access and utilization of cultural information

Respondents were required to give what they would give as strategies for access and utilization of cultural information. These include: Establishing cultural units, provide parental guidelines/care, mobilize resources and establish cultural information centers. It was also observed that to popularize and glorify cultural values, punishments, establish appropriate channels through which cultural information can be communicated to the community. Encourage people to write positive cultural values that should be admired by young generation seemed important for access to information. Publicizing cultural values on radio, and avail written literature to the community is a fundamental task for the problem of student's information and the way forward.

Discussions

From the study, it is clear that there is little access to information by majority of women in rural areas. This observation agrees with what Munyua (2000:94) noted that the little access to information is due to the fact that, the women are mostly poor, illiterate, and unable to afford even the very basic forms of tools for accessing information like radios and telephones. However,

rural women actively seek and disseminate information. Lack of reliable information is a major hindrance to economic development.

The study revealed that the limited sources to access to information affect its utilization. The fact that print media is believed to be an effective way of accessing information is believed by Munyua (2000:99) that have been successfully been relevant where information has been appropriately repackaged in pamphlets, posters, booklets, hand outs, videos, films, cassettes, and radio programs.

Majority of respondents however agrees that of cultural information among the rural women. Culture among the rural women in hint the effective access of retrieval. It was clear that there is ignorance about the existence of information sources among the rural women in Uganda.

Conclusion

In Uganda, many people acknowledge the importance of their culture and attach great value to their cultural identity. However, it is not clear to many how culture can be translated into an instrument for their holistic development. Policy guidelines are required for the transformation of rural women to enable easy access and utilization of cultural information.

Framework for Access and utilization of information for rural women in Uganda

To address cultural information shortfall in the Ugandan society, the following framework provides guidelines to promote the rich cultural heritage as well as improve their lives through their cultures.

Development of Culture

There is a need to advocates for the development of culture. This includes; promotion, conservation, capacity building, provision of information and sensitization on culture as well as ensuring action on those aspects of culture

that impinge on human dignity for cultural diversity, national pride and patriotism.

- a) **Participation and Equity:** This policy should advocate for participation and benefit by all in cultural life. It will ensure that the principle of equity and gender responsiveness in participation and benefit is upheld in cultural programmes for community empowerment.
- b) **Employment Creation and Income Generation:** This policy should underscore the need to promote employment for income generation through cultural related activities. This will be through cultural industries and their ancillary benefits.
- c) **Partnership with Civil Society Organizations and the Private Sector:** This policy should advocate for increased participation of the civil society organizations and the private sector in the development of culture for sustainable development.
- d) **Social Protection:** This policy should advocate for affirmative action for participation in and benefit from cultural life by the vulnerable groups and minorities.

Policy Issues and Implementation Strategies

a) **Language and literary arts:** Language is the raw material of the creative arts of orature and literature. Uganda possesses a rich variety of indigenous languages, in addition to the historical languages like English and Kiswahili. This variety is both an opportunity and a challenge. Since every language is a unique storehouse of knowledge, the multiplicity of our language is a priceless resource. Language especially the historical languages have facilitated the communication of people within and outside the country. The multiplicity of languages has made the development of indigenous languages very expensive. Often information in indigenous languages has to be translated to English if it is to be shared. In the process a lot is lost. An affirmative policy of encouraging and promoting the linguistic arts of orature

and literature should also be devised, both as a means of developing our languages and as a contribution to the expressive, socialization and educational needs of Uganda. The Strategies include ensuring the development of local languages and orature; and Create mechanisms for the promotion and use of local languages and orature.

b) Institutions that promote culture: Institutions that promote culture are; any organized group, community and society regardless of size and status provided that they promote culture. These institutions include Kingdoms, Chiefdoms, clans, the family, ministries in the central Government, Statutory bodies such as Uganda Museum, Uganda National Cultural Centre, civil society organizations, the private sector and religious organizations.

As primary players in their cultures individuals, groups and communities look to these institutions for inspiration as well as assurance of their identity, continuity, education and sensitization, development as well as recreation and pleasure.

It is in the interest of the communities therefore that these institutions are revitalized and strengthened. Without these institutions the cultures so much cherished by the communities are rendered non-functional and are threatened with extinction.

The institutions in Uganda for the promotion of culture are under-resourced, poorly distributed, not well coordinated nor organized and have limited capacity. As a result, some are dormant or performing very poorly.

If Ugandans as individuals or groups have to exercise the right to participate in their cultural life as well as harness their cultures for sustainable development, there is need to invest in the institutions responsible for the promotion and development of culture. The Strategies include:

- Establishment and expansion of institutions and facilities that promote culture.
- Build capacity of institutions that promote culture to foster people's participation in cultural life.

- Facilitate the involvement of the private sector and civil society in the promotion and development of facilities and programmes of these institutions.
- Ensure support for traditional/cultural leaders.
- Establish mechanisms for co-ordination of institutions that promote culture.

Cultural Co-operation

Cultural co-operation entails collaboration and exchange of experiences in culture aimed at promoting mutual benefits, respect, understanding, shared values, enrichment and peaceful co-existence among the diverse cultures and peoples. It promotes positive cultural and community images. It also demystifies false hoods, promotes and encourages investment in the country. It opens new avenues for employment and income generation as well as sensitization of the communities.

Cultural co-operation as practiced in Uganda today emphasizes “cultural exchange” at government-to-government levels, with limited private sector as well as civil society participation. There is also no deliberate encouragement of intra-cultural exchange among the diverse cultures within Uganda.

Culture and Environment

Local communities are dependent on their environment for their survival. The environment influences and in many ways determines their life styles, patterns, and habits. The livelihoods of communities are enhanced if they protect and manage their environment.

However, in recent years, the local environment has been threatened by the poor way in which communities use and manage it. The rate of degradation has been so much that the very survival of communities is threatened. Interventions to arrest environmental degradation have tended to ignore the local well tested, culturally sound ecological management patterns, thus many times alienating communities from the issue of environmental degradation.

Since the question of environmental protection and degradation is of great concern to the survival of the society, it is crucial that the communities are involved in its protection and this can only be sustained if modern methods of environmental protection are supplemented by indigenous methods.

Cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is travel associated with experiencing cultural environments either in form of tangible heritage like sites, monuments, visual arts, crafts, material settlements or intangible heritage like values, performing arts, traditions, beliefs and life styles. Cultural tourism provides the local communities with opportunities for employment, income generation, education as well as recreation and pleasure. Unfortunately, culture, the very base of cultural tourism is overwhelmed and threatened with disappearance by globalization and the negative effects of tourism.

Cultural Industries

Cultural industries allow for the manufacture and distribution of creative products that convey the history, ideas, messages, symbols of moral and aesthetic value. They contribute to cultural development by protecting and enriching cultural values, promoting creativity and optimizing skills of human resources as well as conveying messages that foster understanding and peace. Cultural industries include: publishing and sale of books with local literature, producing and sale of traditional medicine, sale of audio-visual tapes of music and drama, and crafts.

Cultural industries contribute directly to the creation of employment opportunities and producing economic gains and incomes. Cultural industries especially crafts allow for the participation of the vulnerable including women, the youth and the disabled and also for those who have fallen out of formal education. They are sustainable because they rely heavily on locally available resources and skills.

Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is a vital sub-system of culture. It can be inherited and or consciously learned. Indigenous knowledge covers a spectrum of issues on how people do things locally and within their environment using locally available knowledge, skills and resources to survive at a particular time. Uganda is rich in indigenous knowledge especially in the areas of medicine, agriculture, nutrition and management of conflict.

Indigenous knowledge in Uganda is popular because it is accessible and more affordable especially by the poor and vulnerable. If properly developed, Indigenous knowledge can improve agricultural productivity; facilitate the process of conflict resolution as well as contributing to better health.

Indigenous knowledge in Uganda is threatened because it is largely passed on orally and though there have been some efforts to document it, several aspects of it are not documented and could get lost or are not maximally used or benefited from by people living elsewhere. This means that at all times some people enjoy a better quality of life than others.

Also some aspects of indigenous knowledge are outmoded yet people continue to cling to them to their own detriment.

Indigenous knowledge is a powerful resource that enables communities to improve and sustain their lives. There is therefore a need to promote and develop indigenous knowledge systems of communities to improve their social and economic status.

Safeguard of Indigenous knowledge

Collective memory of the world is vital importance in preserving cultural identities. The safeguards includes to assist preservation by most approximately techniques of worlds at safeguards, assist access it, increase awareness and promote the programmed.

Culture and Health

Health is a state of good mind, body and environment. Traditional methods of delivering good health include traditional medicine, nutritious traditional

foods and traditional practices. The importance of traditional health services in post-independence Uganda were recognized in 1963 when a campaign was launched on “native” medicine, and its existence legalized in the Medical and Dental Practitioners Act of 1968. Traditional medicine includes herbalists, spiritual therapists, specialist traditional healers (bone setters, birth attendants) and peddlers.

Functions of Various organs

Culture as a public affair is the responsibility of everyone in society. Therefore, individuals, institutions, organizations and other organs in society should participate in and support cultural life and action. This responsibility shall be shared out broadly as follows:

a) Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development

The Ministry should be able to:

- Ensure the development of policies and programmes in all areas of culture.
- Ensure the development and dissemination of laws related to culture.
- Establish mechanisms for coordination of institutions that promote culture.
- Build the capacity of culture practitioners.
- Build the capacity of institutions that promote culture to foster people’s participation in culture.
- Advocate for culture.
- Develop culture impact assessment tools.
- Ensure the development and enforcement of standards and guidelines for culture.

b) Ministry of Education and Sports shall right integrate culture issues and concerns into educational policies and the development planning process; promote the development and use of local languages in education programmes at all levels.

c) Ministry of Health should be able to design capacity building programmes for traditional health service providers; Train traditional service providers; research, document and disseminate findings on traditional medicine and traditional service providers; and develop and disseminate minimum traditional health service delivery standards, guidelines and indicators.

d) Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Industry

The Ministry should endeavor to promote domestic tourism; develop and promote natural and cultural sites; ensure community, civil society and private sector participation in the conservation and promotion of natural and cultural sites; and ensure the protection of local communities from the negative influences of tourism.

e) Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs

This should be responsible to spearhead the formulation and revision of laws pertaining to culture; Ratify and incorporate international and regional instruments and conventions that promote and are relevant to culture; and promote the protection of the Rights of cultural practitioners.

f) Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources

The Ministry should be able to conduct a cultural impact assessment before the implementation of energy and mining projects; promote traditional methods of preservation of natural resources; and promote indigenous plants and animal species.

g) Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment

The Ministry should be able to conduct a cultural impact assessment before any development on land; ensure representation of cultural practitioners in facility resource user committees; and evaluate and disseminate findings on traditional practices of environmental management.

h) Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries

The Ministry should be able to promote and disseminate findings on indigenous knowledge in Agriculture; promote traditional methods of

production, processing and preservation of cash and food crops; and promote indigenous crops especially food crops as well as nutrition.

i) The Department of Information-Office of the President

This department should publicize local culture through the radio and television; regulate the operations and usage of the media and information communication technologies; and Promote dissemination and sharing of local cultures.

The National Council for Culture: To realize the objectives of this policy, there shall be established the National Council for Culture. Its main functions will be to: -

- Coordinate the different actors in the whole culture sector from local to national levels
- Evaluate the needs for state contribution to the culture sector
- Distribute subsidies to the culture sector
- Advise government on performance of culture sector
- Coordinate and provide support to the different areas of culture

Local Governments: The local governments and municipalities are entrusted with responsibility for cultural affairs in their localities. They should therefore ensure the Development of local cultural policies, based on the guidance of the national policy, Implementation of cultural policies, Establishment of appropriate local organs for management of cultural affairs, and Provision of human, financial and material resources.

Private Sector: The private sector is a major partner in realization of cultural policy. Their participation in cultural action shall include:

Dissemination and distribution of quality cultural industry products such as books, records, video and audiotapes, films. Industrial/commercial patronage of culture through organization of activities for their own personnel, supporting specific activities/institutions and contributing to or setting up foundations/trusts to finance cultural activities.

Civil society organizations: These are Civil society organizations include NGO's, Faith based organizations, Community Based organizations. They include associations and societies directly concerned with culture: -These organizations are expected to:

- Support cultural development, creativity and innovation
- Promote the discovery of new talent
- Encourage people's participation in various forms of cultural expressions
- Encourage individual development and social interaction especially among young people in and out of school.

Faith Based Organizations: Faith based organizations are organizations that are based on religious beliefs. They will Conserve and promote the dissemination of culture and Support culture through their institutional frameworks and other resources.

Traditional Cultural Institutions: They should: Provide resources and networks to promote culture; and collaborate with government, other institutions and individuals in cultural action.

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